



John F. English

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# A Teamster's Life

A Biography by Anne M. Carlucci

On Behalf of The International Brotherhood of Teamsters



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# INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS

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Washington, DC 20001



C. THOMAS KEEGEL  
General Secretary-Treasurer

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[www.teamster.org](http://www.teamster.org)

A cardinal rule of the labor movement—and for life in general—is that one must study the past in order to better prepare for the future. Over the years, our Union has been privileged to call some very remarkable men and women Teamsters. The stories of their lives—their struggles, their sacrifices, their achievements—helped build the foundation of our great Union and helped make North America a better place for all of us.

Teamster stories need to be told and appreciated by all of our members. We need to tell them to our children to ensure that the labor movement maintains a strong connection to its past. That is why we take great pleasure in developing the Teamster History Collection, a series of Teamster biographies and accounts of major milestones in our history. Each book will provide its own unique glimpse of the people and events that foraged the Teamsters into the Union we know today.

As you read these pages, we invite you to share in the celebration of our Union's heritage and to join us as we learn from our proud legacy. And we challenge you to use that knowledge to build a powerful future for all working families.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James P. Hoffa".

James P. Hoffa  
General President

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "C. Thomas Keegel".

C. Thomas Keegel  
General Secretary-Treasurer

# INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS

E. THOMAS KERR  
General President  
120 E. 4th St.  
Chicago, Ill.



JAMES R. HOFFA  
General President  
120 E. 4th St.  
Chicago, Ill.

A cardinal rule of the labor movement—and the life in general—is that one ought always to put in one's own money for the things one needs. This has been pointed out to us many times in the past and we have learned that the only way to get the things we need is to put in our own money. The only way to get the things we need is to put in our own money. The only way to get the things we need is to put in our own money.

Teamsters are proud to be part of the labor movement. We are proud to be part of the labor movement. We are proud to be part of the labor movement. We are proud to be part of the labor movement. We are proud to be part of the labor movement. We are proud to be part of the labor movement. We are proud to be part of the labor movement. We are proud to be part of the labor movement. We are proud to be part of the labor movement. We are proud to be part of the labor movement.

As you read these pages, we think you will find them interesting. We think you will find them interesting. We think you will find them interesting. We think you will find them interesting. We think you will find them interesting. We think you will find them interesting. We think you will find them interesting. We think you will find them interesting. We think you will find them interesting. We think you will find them interesting.

Reading these pages will give you a better understanding of the labor movement. Reading these pages will give you a better understanding of the labor movement. Reading these pages will give you a better understanding of the labor movement. Reading these pages will give you a better understanding of the labor movement. Reading these pages will give you a better understanding of the labor movement. Reading these pages will give you a better understanding of the labor movement. Reading these pages will give you a better understanding of the labor movement. Reading these pages will give you a better understanding of the labor movement. Reading these pages will give you a better understanding of the labor movement. Reading these pages will give you a better understanding of the labor movement.

*E. Thomas Kerr*  
General President  
*James R. Hoffa*  
General President



# Preface

For more than 100 years, the Teamsters Union has been at the forefront of the struggle for workers' rights in North America. The Teamsters philosophy of openness and promoting justice has made the union a leader in the march for progress in the labor movement and throughout North America. It also has allowed the union to thrive and all members to enjoy more freedom in the workplace and higher standards of living than their nonunion counterparts.

This success comes from many sources—a hard working, dedicated membership, good contracts, a willingness to stand up to injustice and visionary leadership. Every contract, strike, organizing victory and piece of pro-labor legislation has built a foundation and created our unique story. Knowing our story is key to using that foundation to build a better future for our union and its members.

Much of our rich history had been allowed to fade into a dim memory, weakening the bond that holds us together as a great union. But, today, all across the country our members are dusting off old photographs and exploring the actions that put the Teamsters at the forefront of the labor movement.

The Teamster History series is being developed as part of that renewed interest in the union's proud traditions and heritage. The books will take a closer look at the individuals and events that played a significant role in creating the Teamsters Union, as we know it today.





# Introduction

Remembered as a union man of unparalleled integrity, honesty and knowledge, John F. English ascended to great heights in the labor movement during more than sixty-five years with the Teamsters, fifty-eight of them as an officer of the Union. The roles he carried out during that time included holding leadership positions in Local 68 and the Boston Joint Council, advising IBT presidents, representing the Union in negotiations with employers and politicians, developing innovative systems of bookkeeping for the Teamsters, and serving as a mentor and role model for his peers and younger officers in the union.

English was born on April 14, 1889 and grew up in South Boston. He joined the Teamsters in 1904 when just out of grammar school. His first job was driving a two-horse dump cart in Beantown from dawn until dusk.

The work of a team driver in the early-twentieth century required a lot of time and hard work. The experience as a driver proved instrumental in the type of union leader English became because he always maintained compassion for workers and their daily struggles.

English's ability to empathize with the cart drivers made him a natural choice to be a representative for them. His determination in getting what he believed the rank-and-file deserved was recognized by the membership, and he quickly climbed the ranks as an elected officer for the local and the joint council.

He was elected as its fifth Vice President in 1927 at just thirty-eight years of age and became a trusted advisor to long-serving Teamster President Dan Tobin. Tobin, having known English since the earliest days of the union, was well aware of his talents as an organizer. In 1936,

he asked him to resign as a Vice President in order to become an International Organizer and Auditor. Over the course of the next decade, English was able to use his various skills to develop organizing campaigns, audit local unions, install or remove charters, and offer his counsel in various union negotiations. He loved this role because he got to travel the country and meet face-to-face with rank-and-file Teamsters in many different industries. Not only did this allow English to learn what was on the membership's mind, but it also afforded him the chance to shoot the breeze with workers - the true heart of the union.

By working closely with the membership, English soon became a mentor by training secretary-treasurers how to do meticulous book-keeping for their locals. While he often had to send the entire treasury of a local union to the International to pay for back capita tax, English always treated these younger officers with respect and diplomacy when correcting any mistakes.

In 1946, he was selected to complete the unexpired term of his long-time friend John Gillespie as Secretary-Treasurer after Gillespie's death. The two men had worked side by side in many difficult campaigns over the years and it was a great tribute for English to be chosen to complete Gillespie's term. The wisdom that English gained over the years as a Teamster, from his earliest days as a driver to his many roles in the union's leadership, was rewarded again when he was reelected to the office of General Secretary-Treasurer by acclamation at the 1952 Teamsters Convention in Los Angeles. He would remain at that post for the rest of his life.

Determination to serve the interests of the rank-and-file motivated English as a union leader. At the 1957 Teamsters' Convention, English told the delegates that "I never looked for publicity from anybody. I didn't like it. The publicity I want is from you. When you smile at me and shake my hand, then I know you appreciate what we are doing."

When he died on February 3, 1969, English was characteristically on the road preparing for a union meeting. But even after his death,

his legacy survived in the many union officers he mentored and the gains he brought to the membership through years of dedication to the IBT.

His memory also lived on in the various endowments that shared his name. Despite having to leave school at the age of fifteen to work, education was always important to English, and many sons and daughters of Teamsters were able to go to college because of those scholarships.

Throughout his life, John English was happiest when he was fighting for working people and the membership of the union he loved. By telling his story and inspiring Teamster brothers and sisters to keep up that fight, we can help make sure that his legacy continues to live on into the future.



# 1 | The Early Days

South Boston. 1904. 5 a.m.

*The flickering gas lamps are near the end of their nightly vigil. As the pre-dawn light slowly snakes its way through the dark alleys and narrow streets, the city begins to awaken. It is still quiet, but soon people will draw back the curtains and emerge from their homes; the shopkeepers will open their doors and noisy children will bustle off to school. In these pre-dawn hours, a young man named John English leaves the cold attic of his uncle's house and winds his way to the horse stables at the Metropolitan Coal Company. Remembered words burn in his ears. "Can't afford to feed them!" "Put them in an orphanage!" The conversation overheard between his father and stepmother rings in his head. It will haunt him for the rest of his life. He rubs hot tears from his eyes and continues his journey through the streets wearing the same clothes he wore the day before and the day before that. A few years prior, he, too, was a schoolboy and 5 a.m. meant there was still time to sleep. But now John English is no longer a schoolboy. He is a working man in charge of a two-horse coal delivery cart. He is a teamster. He is fifteen years old....*

The world of the Boston Teamster was not an easy one, particularly in the early days as workers sought to establish a voice for themselves with various employers in the city. Short tempers and violence were not unusual and coverage of events was frequently slanted in the companies favor. Proving that you were just trying to earn an honest living, support your family and be treated fairly was often the hardest task a teamster faced.

## Boston, 1902

*VIOLENCE IN BOSTON The Washington Post, January 23, 1902*

"A man named Scott cut a rope on one of Brine's teams that had been pocketed on India Street and the load fell to the ground. A crowd of sympathizers gathered and prevented the police from assisting the driver to reload his team."

*THE BOSTON STRIKE Congregationalist and Christian World, February 11, 1902*

"Nothing but the use of all police reserves has quelled the mob and enabled the teams of the corporation which refuses to deal with the teamster's trade union to carry on their work of moving freight about the city. Men who have ventured to act as teamsters for the independent corporation have suffered physical violence and have been insulted by the vilest epithets while at work...."

*UNREST IN THE FIELD OF LABOR The Independent, March 20, 1902*

"In an act of unity, freight handlers and longshoremen refused to handle Brine's freight. Merchandise sat untouched on the wharves or in the rail cars. In three days time, the number of strikers increased from 8,000 to 22,000. The strikers went back to work only when the government intervened."

So read the newspapers in 1902, describing the violence that erupted on Boston's streets when unionized teamsters working for the Brine Transportation Company struck for better wages, hours and conditions. Rather than negotiating, owner Brine hired non-union drivers for its wagons. Thousands of men took to the streets and the flow of commerce came to a halt before order was restored and a settlement was reached. Such was the climate facing the founders of today's union. And such was the climate in which 15-year old John English entered to haul coal.



## Seeking A Better Life

When the Irish immigrants arrived in Boston during the 1850s, they settled in South Boston. The cheap rent and proximity to the docks, factories and railroad made the area geographically desirable to the arriving immigrants, who soon became known as "Southies." They came in waves from their farms in "the old sod," where agriculture had been the mainstay of life. Untrained to work in factories or businesses, they became branded as "unskilled labor." Irish men could only find work as stablers, teamsters, dockworkers and in unskilled factory jobs. The women found employment as domestic help in Boston society families. They often found work more easily than the men, as Boston society was thriving during that time and always looking for household workers.

It was in South Boston in the spring of 1889, at 29 Dorchester Street, that a young "Southie" couple, Mary Holland English and her husband, James P. English, anxiously awaited the arrival of their second child. A healthy boy, whom they named John, was born on April 14. Unlike his short, stocky brother, Thomas, who was two years older, John English would grow up to be a tall imposing man whose height and deep voice created a commanding presence. Sadly, his mother would never see her sons grow into manhood. John's birth was a difficult one and like many women of that time, Mary Holland English died soon after giving birth. She was not yet twenty-five years old. Neither Thomas nor John remembered their dark-haired, petite mother.

Their father, James English, was a big, strapping Irishman who worked as a teamster. Born in Virginia, James English had migrated north in hopes of finding better work. He did find work easily, hauling heavy freight, but it left him little time for other aspects in life, such as raising a family. En route to and from the stables, James spent much time in the bars trying to cope with the loss of his wife and the responsibility for raising two young sons. His drinking was a problem, but not so debilitating that he could not attract another woman to be his wife. When Thomas and John were still small children, James married again.



Jane E. English brought two daughters of her own to the marriage, Margaret and Mary. Jane was a devoted mother to all four children. Despite his father's problems with alcohol, the formative years of John English's life were spent in a loving home and all four children grew extremely close.

But the happiness would not last. Jane died suddenly around 1900, leaving the English home in chaos. James worked longer hours and spent more and more time at the bars. Oddly, this did not keep him from marrying the third time, but the effect on the household would prove devastating.

One night, John and his brother overheard a conversation that would change their lives forever. His father and his stepmother were discussing the need to put all four children up for adoption in order for any of them to survive. Horrified, 16-year old Thomas and 14-year old John packed their few belongings and headed for the home of Jim Holland, their natural mother's brother. Uncle Jim and his wife, always fond of the boys, welcomed them in and gave them the only room in the house they had to give; the cold attic. His step-sisters, Margaret and Mary, were indeed sent to an orphanage; an event that haunted John English his entire life.

Decades later, at the height of his success, that pain is still evident in English's address to the Western Conference of Teamsters. "I never knew my mother. My father was a drunk and didn't care about my brother or my stepsisters. He put the girls in an orphanage and he would have put me there too but I ran away. I was raised by an uncle and slept in the attic with my clothes on in the winter, because it was so cold."

## The Beginning of the Brotherhood

At the turn of the last century, organized labor began to take on a new face. During the 1880's the Knights of Labor was the dominant labor organization and its membership consisted of thousands of unskilled workers. By the middle of the 1890's, the Knight's strength was waning;

its membership, while large, was unorganized and its finances were unstable. In 1881, a young labor activist in Pittsburgh named Samuel Gompers helped found the Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions, a loose confederation of various unions. The group included the Cigar Makers, where Gompers was a member. In 1886, this confederation was reconstituted as the American Federation of Labor with Gompers as the President. Gompers office was an 8x10 room in a shed and his son served as the office boy. There was \$160 in the treasury. As Gompers said, it was "much work, little pay and very little honor."

Four years later, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) represented 250,000 workers. In two more years the number had grown to over one million. Under Gompers, the strategy was to concentrate on collective bargaining and on legislative issues directly affecting workers on the job. Broad social reforms and debilitating political entanglements were left to others. As the AFL grew and attracted the skilled workers of the trade unions, the Knights of Labor ultimately ceased to exist.<sup>1</sup>

A new era had begun. In 1899, the AFL chartered the Team Drivers International Union (TDIU). The strongest centers of organized teamsters at that time were in Boston, St. Louis, Chicago and New York. The largest, most organized group was in Chicago. This group disagreed with the TDIU over membership eligibility and dues - basic owner/operator issues. In protest, they formed their own organization, the Teamsters National Union in 1902.<sup>2</sup>

In August, 1903, at the urging of Gompers, the two rival unions held a joint convention in Niagara Falls, New York. At that event, after long, often heated debate, an amalgamation vote was passed and The International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) was officially chartered. Indianapolis, Indiana was selected as the headquarters as the city was located in the "heart" of the country. Cornelius Shea, a Boston Irishman, was elected President.<sup>3</sup> The IBT had 50,000 members and \$25,000 in its treasury.<sup>4</sup> The new union would take on a much grander name after the Convention, becoming The International Brotherhood

of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Stablemen and Helpers of America. The union's first motto conveyed the spirit and goals of those early members: "United to Protect, Not Combined to Injure."

In 1904, English joined Teamsters Local 191 (Tip Cart Drivers) in Boston. The union was one year old; English was 15. His first job was as a chauffeur of a two-horse "tip" or dump cart carrying coal. Over the next 63 years, both English and the IBT would witness great strides for organized labor. The Teamsters would become the strongest union in the United States with millions in its membership and in its treasury. English would rise from a coal hauler in a Tip Cart Driver Local to be the IBT's second highest executive - the General Secretary-Treasurer.

## 2 | The Union Life

Neither the passage of time nor the comforts of a successful life would erase English's memories of long days sitting atop a wooden bench, driving a horse-drawn wagon filled with coal. Throughout his six-decade career, English would routinely pepper his conversations with stories from his Boston days as a coal hauler. He would do this often and anywhere, whether sitting behind the large, polished desk in his office which overlooked the U.S. Capitol, or standing behind a lectern addressing thousands of delegates at Teamster conventions. Those who knew English personally said that when he started reminiscing he seemed to "just go back there." These experiences formed the core of who he was, how he viewed the world and his adherence to the idea that if you could do a good turn for your fellow man you should do it.

### Teamster Beginnings

The word "teamster" is derived from the art of teaming, or driving a team of horses. Before the turn of the 19th century, a teamster was generally considered an unskilled worker. In spite of that, they played a critical role in the economy. In 1903, the Treasurer of the AFL, John Lennon, said, "There is no industry today that can successfully carry on their business if the teamster lays down his reins."<sup>5</sup>

In 1904, the teamster was described as follows: "The teamster holds the strategic point in the battle between labor and employer. You can see him any day in the rush and jam of the downtown street, an Irish-American, big hearted, honest. There was this difference between them

and the sweat shop victims: Society, while it sweated the wretched tailor, taught him to lie down and die: it taught the teamster to fight back.... The teamster amply made good the name which the County Hospital doctors have given him, 'the roughest, toughest scrapper of the working classes.'"<sup>6</sup> The depictions also accurately described English. He was tough and ready to fight for what he believed in - namely the union and his members.

While teaming was not limited to the Irish, John English and other key figures in the early labor movement such as Cornelius Shea, Dan Tobin and John Gillespie were all Boston Irishmen. As late as 1942, the Irish influence in Massachusetts labor remained strong. "In the Boston area and throughout the larger part of Massachusetts, the Irish form the largest part of the (union) membership. The union has long been officered by persons of Irish ancestry."<sup>7</sup> The role of Irish Americans in the Teamsters remained at the core of the union for years to come. In 1957, a delegate at the 17th convention noted that while flags of practically every nation were on the floor of the convention hall, the Irish flag was missing. "I request the Chair, if it is possible, to try to see that we get a flag of that great nation whose sons and ancestry man this Convention."<sup>8</sup> They found a flag.

In 1907, Daniel J. Tobin, a 32 year old fuel oil driver from Boston, was elected as President of the Teamsters and would serve 45 years in that capacity. His lifelong friend, fellow oil wagon driver and trusted confidant, John Gillespie, became the first general organizer for the union and ultimately would become the General Secretary-Treasurer of the IBT in 1941. In 1946, when Gillespie died, Tobin asked English to take Gillespie's place. English knew it would be hard to fill Gillespie's shoes, but Tobin insisted no one was better for the job. The members agreed. English would be re-elected by acclamation at every convention until his death in 1969. As English rose through the ranks, the skills, the traditions, the hard work and the fellowship of his union brothers - all the memories of his days as a



wagon driver stayed with him. Much of the strength and integrity that would become hallmarks of his reputation had their foundation in those early Boston days.

## A Teamster's Work and Wages

When the term "unskilled labor" is used today, we think of workers who exercise no independent judgment in carrying out the duties of the job. This was hardly true for the teamster. He was responsible for delivering goods from point to point. He was also responsible for taking care of his team of horses; accounting for lost or damaged goods and making sure the merchants to whom he delivered were on time with their payments - a driver, an accountant, a risk manager and a bill collector.

English was a coal hauler, or coal heaver, as it was sometimes called. The job was so named because the coal chute was often not large enough to allow the coal to be dumped directly from the cart. Therefore, the teamster had to manually fill a basket or bag with coal and dump it down the chute himself. It was a tiring, dirty job.

A teamster like the 15 year-old English was expected to arrive at the stable at least an hour before his delivery work began and remain long after his deliveries were finished. During this time, he would feed and clean his horses; clean out their stalls; grease and repair his wagon or cart, clean his harnesses and polish the brass. He was required to report to the stables on Sunday to take care of the horses and perform other duties in preparation for the following week. He was not compensated for the early arrivals, the late departures or the Sunday hours, even though this work was essential to get his team ready to make deliveries.<sup>9</sup>

The teamster's horses were not regarded as beasts of burden, but as critical members of the workforce who needed care and humane treatment. In 1906, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Boston launched a campaign to ensure that working horses were well cared for by offering prizes for the work horse "which was in a man's care the longest and made the best appearance for the amount of labor

which he had performed." The IBT praised the Boston teamsters for their efforts after a Society representative reported that the large majority of the work horses in Boston were well fed and free from sores or lameness. The IBT noted that, "Anything that will help the animal we drive certainly reflects credit upon the teamster."<sup>10</sup> English took good care of his teams and thought of them as his partners.

One old-timer, who drove a milk wagon in Boston, recounted that the horses would come when you whistled for them. Unfortunately, they also would come when the boss whistled. In the cold winter months Teamsters sometimes stopped in the local bar early in the morning for a "nip" to "warm up." When they came out, they might find their team waiting all the way down the street, having been whistled for by the employer when he saw them "parked" in front of the bar. John English could and would tell hundreds of similar stories about his teams. On the job, the horses helped make the day go smoothly. Sometimes, it was more efficient for the teamster to deliver milk by cutting through the backyards of neighboring houses. The horses were trained to walk around the corner and wait for their driver on the other side of the block. Teamsters always carried apples or other treats to reward the team for a job well done. It was not uncommon for the teamster to be driving around freezing while the horses had blankets draped over them. Drivers from locals in major cities even went on strike to defend their horses when companies decided to cut out the break for the noontime feeding of the teams. The strikers won and lunch was restored.

Half a century later, English's office suite in the Teamsters headquarters would be dominated by a horse motif. Of particular note was a large, bronze statue of a horse near the dark wood bookshelves that lined one wall of his office. The statue, worn to a smooth patina from years of children's affectionate petting, was one of his cherished items. Sometimes he would hang his hat on the horse to give it a jaunty look.

When English was starting out as a driver in 1904 a teamster's wages were not good and varied by industry. The laundry driver, the milk



wagon driver and the coal driver had different hours of work and different rates of pay. For example, prior to 1901, a Chicago coal team driver with a two-horse wagon could expect to earn 50 cents a load for 4 or 5 tons. Later that year, the teamsters negotiated a new wage schedule with the coal dealers and they then earned \$8 - \$12 a week with indefinite hours.<sup>11</sup> Upon being nominated for the General Secretary-Treasurer position in 1947, English told the delegates: "I can remember the day (Dan Tobin) was elected. I was driving a two-horse coal team in the city of Boston for \$13.00 a week and 22 cents an hour overtime."<sup>12</sup> Tobin would bring about changes that would improve the wages and lives of all the drivers.

The memories of those days were always in the back of English's mind and fueled his drive to serve the members. When speaking to Chicago Teamsters in 1949, English told of "the early days when a teamster local could not dare ask for more than a dollar a week increase and of the time when a ten-cent-per month dues hike almost caused a rebellion."<sup>13</sup> Tobin also remembered the early days and the battles to improve wages and working conditions. "John Gillespie was driving a team of horses in Boston for \$9 a week when I first met him almost 50 years ago. We were trying to organize a union to correct the intolerable conditions under which the Teamsters worked. Drivers then received little pay, no vacations, no Sundays off and were forced to work unlimited hours."<sup>14</sup> Fighting for better working conditions, decent hours and fair pay for all members were the bonds that brought Boston team drivers like Daniel Tobin, John Gillespie and, eventually, John English together. Men such as Mike Casey in San Francisco, Mike Cashal in New York, John Geary in St. Paul, D.J. Murphy of St. Louis and Tom Hughes from Chicago were waging similar battles in their cities. These men, with their tenacity, determination to get a fair shake for Teamsters on the job, and their desire to bring dignity and respect to the working class, became the bulwark upon which the young union was built.

## Getting Organized

As a young driver, John English was approached by a local Teamster organizer who explained the benefits of union membership. The long hours and harsh conditions under which Teamsters worked gave the organizers a receptive audience. Their message was summed up by Cornelius Shea, the first president of the IBT in 1904, the year English received his union card: "To any man who is ambitious to better his conditions of living, there can be no reason advanced why he should not join the organization of his craft, and especially is this true of the teamster.... The teamster had no way of resenting the unjust treatment that was heaped upon him.... His hours of labor were the very longest; oftentimes from 4 o'clock in the morning until 8 or 9 o'clock at night besides working half a day on Sunday caring for the horses, greasing and cleaning the harness and wagon, for which he received the lowest possible wages.... Take, for instance, the coal Teamsters of Brockton, Massachusetts who, prior to their organizing five years ago, were working for eight to nine dollars a week. They now receive \$2.50 per day and go to work at 8 o'clock in the morning and receive overtime at the rate of 35 cents per hour for all services performed after 5 o'clock in the evening...." "We feel that it should take no great amount of persuasion to show to the teamsters of the country that their place is in their trade union, and that the teamsters' organization is recognized as one of the leading labor organizations of this country."<sup>15</sup>

For a teenager whose workdays were habitually twelve hours long, hauling loads of dirty coal with little time to socialize or just enjoy being young, listening to someone from an organization that promised to fight for workers rights and fair wages was compelling. English joined Local 191, The Tip Cart Drivers Union. Drivers typically joined the local that represented the craft in which they worked. There were general locals that represented heavy freight drivers and other similar crafts, but most locals in the early days were defined by industry. There were ice driver locals, bakery locals, laundry drivers and beer wagon

drivers, fuel oil drivers and grain delivery drivers just to name a few. Some locals were very specific, such as the "Bone and Tallow Drivers" from the Chicago stockyards, "Funeral Coach Drivers" in Trenton, New Jersey and the "House Wrecking Drivers" in New York City.

Organizing took place on the street. In those days, the people you worked with became your friends. Thus, union membership gained momentum through word of mouth. The employer, determined to avoid unions would sometimes make veiled threats about cutting jobs or closing down to make workers fear for their jobs. Therefore, organizing would take place on the side or in secret meetings. These were rugged days in labor, especially for organizers. Appointed by the principal officer in the union, the organizer was someone who knew the business and would try to persuade both the teamster and the boss to seek common ground. His main job, though, was to increase the number of members giving the union more strength in negotiations. Organizers were harassed, beaten up and sometimes arrested. Employers knew all the tricks and had the money to disrupt or even halt organizing drives. English, who served as an organizer for many years, told his fellow delegates in 1947, "We walked around trying to organize men, and we carried the office in our pocket. We carried pencils in our pocket that cost 10 cents a dozen and we bought a rent receipt book for five cents apiece, and I want to tell you things were tough... we knew what it was to be poor, and we knew what it was to be hungry but we felt there was a job to be done and we knew that somebody had to do it."<sup>16</sup>

As the IBT grew, organizing became a visible position with defined responsibilities. So important was the position, Tobin built a staff of 25 organizers reporting directly to him. Tobin kept track of his union through comprehensive written reports which he demanded of his general organizers. Later in his career, English would join this group and travel nationwide.<sup>17</sup>

In 1907, English transferred to Local 68, the Coal Drivers Union. In 1910, he was elected as a business agent. He was 21 years old. John M.

Gillespie, who would become a close friend, was the organizer in the district. With that election English began a 25-year career with the local that saw him rise to be a respected, educated power in the Metropolitan Boston labor movement. The reputation would then follow him to the highest levels in the IBT.

English often joked he had to go to work for the union, because he was running out of coal companies to drive for because of his ideas. In a 1957 interview he explained further. "Once in the union, I never worked any one place too long because they said I was an agitator". What did I care? If I didn't work there I'd work somewhere else." He believed in promoting the union, but discovered that the "somewhere elses" were starting to disappear.

In general, a business agent was responsible for maintaining good relationships between union members and the employer and ensuring the contract provisions were fairly applied. If a Teamster filed a grievance against the employer, the business agent, as the union representative, accompanied the worker to meet with the boss. English handled all of these responsibilities well and became known as a good friend to have by the members. The business agent also collected the dues, no small part of his responsibilities. English carried a brown bag, called a "Boston bag," in which he put the dues collected. English knew to arrive at a worksite on payday to ensure the men had their dues money. His tall frame soon became a familiar sight hurrying around the city with his Boston bag, collecting dues. His natural aptitude for math and his good rapport with fellow workers became the hallmark for his future success. Also, one of his strongest traits began to come into play: keeping written accounts and keeping them straight.

In English's first year as a business agent he helped craft a momentous new agreement with the coal driver employers. The agreement established a nine-hour workday and cut one half-day from the six-day workweek. Wages were raised and there were substantial increases in overtime wages, especially on Saturday. One of the parts of the



agreement English was most pleased with stipulated that no worker would be fired without a fair and impartial hearing on the charges. English and other officers also ensured that drivers would get off "Lexington Day," April 19th, and Bunker Hill Day, June 17th, in addition to standard holidays.

English was selected as a delegate to the 1912 IBT Convention which was held in Indianapolis during the first week of October. He was happy to be selected and anxious to have an opportunity to talk to other delegates from around the Country. The Convention proved to be a good one for a first time delegate. During the proceedings, it was decided that all labor and services connected with the Convention must be provided by union workers to every extent possible. This included everything from the waiters serving food and musicians providing entertainment to the printing of labels and badges and workers in the hotels. The Teamsters were the first union to do this on such a large scale. The 1912 Convention also heralded a major change for the future of transportation. On June 20th of that year, five Teamster members made the first transcontinental delivery trip from Philadelphia to San Francisco in a motor truck. The trip took 90 days. Tobin had been watching the advances with motor vehicles and was primed to have his members be the first trained to drive and maintain the new motor trucks. These were exciting times for a young man in the union.

By 1917, English had been promoted to bookkeeper and Assistant to the Secretary Treasurer of Local 68. Like many founders of organized labor during that time, he had only a grammar school education. Thirty years later, in 1947, William Green, President of the AFL, commented on the education of labor leaders. "We do not graduate from universities, but we graduate from the school of hard experience and training among those who serve in life, wherever it may be. I am happy to note that our great trade union movement has followed that rule that the leaders must come from those who have served in the ranks, they must have a background of experience, and they must have knowledge of the

economic difficulties the workers face.... You cannot learn that lesson in an academic way; you must learn it through the school of hard experience."<sup>18</sup> John English certainly fit that mold.

From the beginning of his career, English showed an aptitude for numbers and possessed an ability to work with all kinds of people. He was more than 6 feet tall, towering over those who stood next to him. His commanding presence was attributed not only his height and resonating voice, but also to his straightforward, no-nonsense approach. He was also a good story teller and could hold people's attention - even if the subject being discussed was not too thrilling. But perhaps more importantly, he was a good listener. Members felt they could come and talk to him when problems arose. While they knew he might chide them for getting into a jam that could have been avoided, they also knew he would do whatever he could to help them out.

# 3 | World War I

While the American labor movement was gathering strength and momentum, the situation in Europe was tenuous. In 1914, Archduke Ferdinand of Austria and his wife were killed by an assassin's bullet in Sarajevo. This incident led the Austria-Hungarian government to declare war against Serbia. In response, Germany and other allies of Serbia declared war on Austria-Hungary, igniting World War I. Soon most of Europe became engulfed in the conflict.

While the United States did not enter the war until much later, orders for goods to support the war effort drove unemployment rates to nearly zero and union membership soared. In April 1917, the United States formally entered World War I. Dan Tobin had been traveling to England on behalf of Woodrow Wilson, studying labor and war transportation prior to U.S. involvement. After the declaration of war, the Teamsters were asked by the United States Army to aid in training soldiers how to drive motor trucks and devise efficient supply delivery. Teamster members also joined all branches of the Armed Services.

In 1917, 28-year old John English walked into Ward 21, Precinct 3 on Evans Street in Boston to register for the military. He signed his registration form as a Business Agent for Coal Teamster Union #68 at 213 Union Park Street, Boston. The registrar officer noted the recruit was single and "tall." English was inducted into the Army. Having passed the gunner's examination, he went to France with the coast artillery and was promoted to sergeant. His skills as a business agent helped him move up the ranks quickly as he already had leadership skills and the ability to think on his feet. He served his country for 10 months. When he returned safely to Boston, he was not yet 30 years old.



When he enlisted, he was engaged to a young Irish woman, Gertrude Kurwin. Other than his uncle Jim and his family, English had no real family to call his own. His father and stepmother were banished permanently from his life. His beloved brother Tom died from influenza aboard ship on his way to Europe to fight in the war. Tom, who had also been single, lived with John and worked as a clerk at Ginter Grocery. English had lost contact with his step sisters after they were sent to the orphanage back in 1904. He hoped to create a happy family with Gertrude, like the days he remembered when his stepmother Jane was alive and the girls were home.

But the war added a possible twist to that dream. His success in the army while overseas led him to contemplate a career in the military. In fact, the officers in his unit strongly encouraged him to do so. However, his engagement to Gertrude and his devotion to the Union and its cause drew him back home in the end.

While English and many other union members were overseas, the labor movement experienced great strides on the home front during World War I. The AFL position on war was generally pacifist in nature. The organization greatly valued human life over military strength and endorsed a league of nations for maintaining peace. This philosophy stemmed from a historical belief that large armies could be used to suppress labor, both domestically and abroad. At a conference in Washington in 1917, the AFL issued a statement entitled, "American Labor's Position in Peace and in War." "War has never put a stop to the necessity for struggle to establish and maintain industrial rights.... as the representatives of the wage-earners we assert that conditions of work and pay in government employment and in all occupations should conform to principles of human welfare and justice.... The one agency which accomplishes this for the workers is the organized labor movement. The greatest step that can be made for national defense is not to bind and throttle the organized labor movement but to afford its greatest scope and opportunity for voluntary effective cooperation in spirit and action."

During the war years, the Administration of President Woodrow Wilson created the National War Labor Board that was responsible for settling differences between labor and management through mediation and conciliation. The Board did not want strikes disrupting the war efforts and devoted the majority of its efforts to three key issues: wages, hours and non-discrimination for union membership. The Board, while having no powers of enforcement, was authorized to appoint a succession of committees and arbitrators to resolve labor disputes and ultimately succeeded in strengthening the unions of several industries including Western Union Telegraph and the Post Office Department.

In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson addressed the AFL convention in Buffalo, New York. He was the first President of the United States ever to address a labor convention. His speech addressed the need for peaceful settlements of labor disputes. The country simply could not afford unrest or strikes in the face of the war effort. "Nobody has the right to stop the processes of labor until all the methods of conciliation and settlement have been exhausted. We must do what we have declared our purpose to do, see that the conditions of labor are not rendered more onerous by the war, but also that we shall see to it that the instrumentalities by which conditions of labor are improved are not blocked or checked."<sup>20</sup>

Membership in organized labor as a whole increased dramatically during this period. In 1920, there were almost 5 million union members.<sup>21</sup> That same year, Teamster membership peaked at about 112,000.<sup>22</sup>

World War I was over by 1919. Europe was left a smoldering battleground and the American economy, no longer producing the goods required for the war effort, was plunged into disarray. The Board was dissolved and unemployment rose dramatically. Employers tried to reverse the wartime gains labor had achieved and strikes were rampant throughout the country. Textile workers, mineworkers, auto workers, all struck during 1919. There was also a massive general strike in Winnipeg, Canada that year, which included some Teamsters.

During these turbulent times, Tobin emphasized to the membership several policies that were the underpinnings of his leadership and would also become English's core values throughout his career. First, Tobin was very careful about Teamster participation in sympathy strikes, boycotts or other struggles undertaken by other unions. He wanted to make sure he understood the cause and the ramifications of the disputes clearly and he wanted to know exactly what was being asked of his Union. Second, Tobin was convinced that union strength lay not only in a healthy membership but also in a healthy treasury. To this end, he supported raising the per capita tax from the local. Finally, he implemented specific rules for approving strikes by the locals, thus having more control of strike benefit usage.<sup>23</sup>

When English returned from the war, he resumed his career with Local 68. For the next twenty-five years he would stay in the Boston area, advancing within the ranks of the Union. His many talents and persuasive personality were great assets and helped strengthen the local's finances. In time, these qualities would also help him get elected as Secretary-Treasurer of Local 68. To be elected to this position required earning the trust of his colleagues, the loyalty of the rank and file and the ability to wear many hats. The position of Secretary-Treasurer was described for the members in a 1936 issue of the Teamster magazine: "Secretary Treasurers of local unions who receive only small salaries... should have all the help that can possibly be given by the local union and the membership. Such men deserve a good deal of credit because many of them make a sacrifice. But on the other hand, the confidence reposed in such men by their membership who select them to office to handle their monies, is an honor that dollars and cents cannot purchase. No greater tribute can be paid to a man than to have his own kind, his fellow men, elect him to the office of secretary treasurer and place their trust in him."<sup>24</sup> Sympathetic, aggressive and a champion in arbitration, English would also serve his organization well beyond the boundaries of the local in that quarter

century. He promoted and expanded the influence of the Boston Joint Council and served as recording secretary, vice president and finally president of the council.

In 1921, English married his longtime fiancée Gertrude Anne Kurwin. She was almost seven years younger than John, but had grown up in the same area as he had and knew many of the same families. Gertrude also understood the issues facing workers and the growing importance of the union in the community. English worked long hours and was often called away to handle problems, but Gertrude was always supportive of his career. Like the rest of the Irish population, the couple lived in Dorchester. In 1927, after years of steadfastly serving the union, he was elected Fifth Vice President of the IBT. He was 38. Although he remained in Boston and stayed active in the Union there, he now would become a member of the general executive board and begin to participate in union affairs at the International level. English and his wife were happy and looking forward to a solid future - for themselves and the Union English helped lead. However, storm clouds were gathering over the U.S. economy that would affect those futures.



## 4 | The Great Depression

The events of October 29, 1929 are legendary. The stock market crashed and the New York Stock Exchange lost 40 percent of its value - a paper loss of 26 billion dollars. By 1932, the national income was 41.7 billion dollars, down from 87 billion in 1929. By 1933, nearly 13 million people were unemployed. These unemployed workers demonstrated, organized and marched demanding relief. In Detroit it was reported that "the men are sitting in the Parks all day long and all night long, hundreds and thousands of them, muttering to themselves, out of work, seeking work." The Union's rolls were hit too. By 1933, IBT membership had declined to 75,000 - the lowest since the end of World War I.<sup>25</sup>

The election of Franklin Roosevelt over President Herbert Hoover in 1932 signaled the beginning of a new era in labor-government relations. Dan Tobin and Roosevelt formed a close relationship and Tobin worked tirelessly for his friend and for labor. As troubled as times were, many people, including Tobin, felt a dark cloud had been lifted after the election. A member of the Roosevelt administration said, "It's a new world, people feel free again. They can breathe naturally. It's like quitting the morgue for the open woods."<sup>26</sup> Roosevelt began to rely on Tobin and other Teamsters for advice and to help implement new labor policies. The Teamsters had helped Presidents and other government offices before, particularly in times of crisis, but they had never had this kind of access to Washington leaders.

The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) was enacted on June 16, 1933. It strengthened labor-management relations by encouraging mutual agreements on key issues such as hours of labor and a minimum

wage. A critical provision of the NIRA was that employees would have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing.<sup>27</sup>

But change would come slowly. And, in some places, workers needs were too great to wait out a long bureaucratic process. In 1934, nearly 1.5 million workers engaged in work stoppages. Strikes, often violent, took place in three major cities, Toledo, San Francisco and Minneapolis, and affected the automotive parts industry, the docks and wharfs, and the trucking industry.<sup>28</sup> Although the Supreme Court invalidated the NIRA in 1935, after the government failed to deliver on its promises, the groundwork had been established for labor's return and union membership dramatically increased. Subsequently, Congress passed the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, also known as the Wagner Act, which outlawed discriminatory practices against union members and interference with labor organizations.<sup>29</sup> It also created the National Labor Relations Board to oversee elections for union representation and arbitrate grievances over alleged unfair labor practices by unions or management.<sup>30</sup>

Tobin, General President of the IBT for nearly 30 years at this point, was himself rising within the hierarchy of the national labor movement. He was also becoming involved in national politics. A supporter of Roosevelt for president in 1932, he was appointed Chairman of the Labor Division of the Democratic Party National Campaign Committee.

The Teamsters were also gaining strength and size. In 1929, the Teamsters had approximately 98,000 members. By 1933, membership had suffered a 23,000 drop. In 1934, as the New Deal legislation began to take effect and the trucking industry began to organize under the Teamster umbrella, the Union recruited 37,000 new members. Membership in the 1930's continued to grow steadily and by 1939, the Teamsters had more than 400,000 members. The numbers would continue to rise steadily for the next three decades.<sup>31</sup>

English had become a familiar figure in the New England region. His height and commanding presence were the first things people noticed

and remembered. But it wasn't long before people were commenting on his breadth of experience and his unwavering devotion to the betterment of his fellow Teamsters. English, largely self-educated after learning the basics in grammar school, also was becoming known for his ability to discuss labor law and other policies with intelligence and insight everywhere from barrooms to the governor's office. Members who knew English from the Boston days recalled him as very tall, soft spoken and a true gentleman. Others likened his appearance and manner at times to that of a school principal - someone who cared and was respected by all, but would also make you fly right. When teased about his humble beginnings as a coal hauler, he would just laugh and say he had done alright. He never minded the teasing and never tried to hide his background. Whenever English met members, the first thing he would do was ask if there anything he could do for them. Years later, he would reiterate that commitment to some 2,000 delegates at an IBT convention. "I have been all over this country and I helped you everywhere I could. The worst you ever got from English was an even break, and I am going to continue on in the same way. I know I don't have to pledge myself to you, because you know me, but I swear to the Good Lord above, I will support Dan Tobin, up or down, sink or swim... to the finish because I am working for the best gang of fellows in the country and that is you."<sup>32</sup>

Personal tragedy struck in 1930. On September 3, 1930, English's beloved wife gave birth to a baby girl. It was a difficult birth and Mrs. English remained in the hospital for a few extra days to recover. Assured by the doctors that all was well, English boarded a train to a Teamster convention in Cincinnati intending to return a few days later. On September 8, he received a phone call that his wife had suffered a heart attack. Grief stricken, he rushed back to Boston, but she died before he arrived. She was 36 years old. To make matters worse, there was something not quite right with the baby girl, but the doctors could not pinpoint exactly what it was. Her tongue protruded slightly and the doctors



said that a minor operation would remedy the situation. But the doctors were wrong about this too. Suddenly a widower and new father, the grieving English vowed his daughter would always have a loving home and the best care possible no matter what he had to do.

## 5 | Sorrow and Joy

The little girl, christened Gertrude Anne after her mother, was found to be mentally handicapped. Her abilities and intellect would not progress much past that of a ten-year old. English was a devoted father and saw to it that Gertrude received the best care and surrounded by people who would nurture her. Upon his wife's death, English and his daughter moved in with his in-laws who cared for the baby while English tended to union business. In the ensuing years, Gertrude would become a well-known member of the Teamster "family" and would be remembered fondly for her sunny disposition and love of singing.

When the Teamsters moved its Headquarters to Washington, DC in 1953, English and his second wife, Katherine, whom he married in 1948, moved to Bethesda, Maryland. Like her husband, Katherine Noonan English was a native Bostonian, born in 1894. She had been in the workforce prior to her marriage serving as a stenographer in a railway office for a number of years. Gertrude and Katherine were close, but because of her special needs, Gertrude lived in a specialized home in nearby Rockville, Maryland. English made an unannounced visit there one day and was not happy with the care Gertrude was receiving. He subsequently moved her to the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital in Tacoma Park, Maryland. It was here Gertrude English met Sadie Hudson, who would not only provide private nursing care, but would treat Gertrude as a member of her own family. By 1956, Gertrude would often spend Saturday night until Wednesday morning with the Hudson family rather than spending every day at the hospital.

In 1960 English bought a beach house in Shady Side Maryland in a place called Felicity Cove. Gertrude and the Hudson family, Ralph and

Sadie and their son Ron, would spend weekends and summers there, enjoying the outdoors and the water. By this time, English was at the height of his career as General-Secretary Treasurer. He opened his beach home to IBT employees and their families during the summer. Staff members who worked with him fondly remember outings at Felicity Cove where everyone enjoyed the beach, the water and boat rides on English's boat, the "Gertrude Anne." Gertrude delighted in the company and the water; she loved boat rides where she could watch the water skiers hang off the back of the boat as it shot through the water. "Faster! Faster!" she would yell as the boat picked up speed and the spray hit her face.

Felicity Cove was full of families, and Gertrude became a familiar figure, sitting on the porch. Neighbors, adults and children alike, would stop and chat. To enable her to get around easily, English bought a golf cart that was driven by either Mrs. Hudson or other adults. As they drove around, neighborhood children often jumped on the back and caught a ride.

Every Tuesday, Gertrude would come to the Teamster Headquarters in downtown Washington D.C. There, she and English would have lunch together in the cafeteria and she would see all her "Teamster family" friends. Just like at Felicity Cove, she became a familiar figure at the IBT building and people would stop by their table and visit. Teamster headquarters also became the venue for her birthday parties. Each September, English would arrange for the celebration and all the staff was invited. Bob Downing, the Manager of the General Accounting Office for many years, remembered Gertrude fondly. He recalled she liked giving gifts as much as receiving them. Each year at Christmas, she would spend many hours making pot holders for all her friends at the Teamsters building. Everyone always appreciated her efforts, because they were so heartfelt. Even after his death in 1969, Gertrude would continue to visit Teamster headquarters as she had become so much a part of the Teamster family.

Mrs. Hudson would be Gertrude's nurse from 1956 until her retirement in 1980. Gertrude was well provided for in her father's will and lived the rest of her life in the Magnolia Gardens home in Maryland. She remained close to her stepmother, Katherine, and the Hudsons. She was also close with the Mullenholz family. Bill Mullenholz had become an accountant for the Teamsters in 1937 when the Union was headquartered in his hometown of Indianapolis. He became Comptroller in the late 1940s and got to know English quite well over the years. When the International moved to Washington DC in 1953, Mullenholz and his family moved too. In later years, the family assumed responsibility for Gertrude's well being until her death at age 73 in 2003. She is buried in Boston in the same gravesite with her father and stepmother. Her natural mother, Gertrude Anne Kurwin English, lies nearby in the Kurwin family gravesite.<sup>33</sup>

## 6 | On the Road

In 1936, Tobin tapped English to become a General Organizer and Auditor for the IBT which meant stepping down as a Vice President. Tobin felt this was a way to showcase and better use English's skills while improving local union finances at the same time. After 25 years of serving the New England region, English would now travel around the country to either audit the books of local unions or engage in large scale organizing. At the 1947 convention, English told the delegates: "At that time the instructions I got from Dan Tobin, when I received the job, remain with me to this day: 'John' he said, 'if they are right, go to hell for them; if they are wrong, they are out. If there is any question in your mind or any technicality, give them the benefit of the doubt.' How could I go wrong? These are the instructions I received."<sup>34</sup> This was a time of rapidly rising membership. In 1936, membership was about 172,000 and over the ten years English held this new post, it would climb to over 750,000.

### The Organizer

Tobin had very strong views on the qualifications required to be an organizer. In 1931, when the economy was reeling from the Depression and membership growth was slow at best, he wrote, "A great deal depends on the class of men selected as organizers. As a rule, only one out of every ten applicants for the position of organizer is capable of filling the job. An organizer has to have judgment, tact, diplomacy and courage, for in a sense, he is an ambassador for the International Union.... What counts most is an organizer's ability to settle disputes



and handle wage scales in order that there may not be a stoppage of work. The old-time rough and ready individual, who called men out on strike at every drop of the hat, is a thing of the past... an individual of that kind is not much good to the International organization.... Consequently, I have tried out men and have endeavored to select the best and I think if you will look over our staff of organizers, ... you will perhaps find that we have as good a class of men engaged in this line of work as can be found in any organization of labor in this country.”<sup>35</sup>

The position of the National or General organizer has its roots back in the early days of union expansion. As organizations grew, the Presidents and Secretary-Treasurers of these fledgling unions could not respond to all requests for help, so traveling organizers were sent out nationwide to assist the locals. Unions quickly realized organizing was their lifeblood and subsidized it accordingly. In 1899, the American Federation of Labor employed a number of full-time organizers and spent \$6,373 on organizing expenses or 17% of its income. Dan Tobin appointed the first General Organizer, John Gillespie, in 1908 followed by Tom “Brocky” Ferrell several months later. The Teamsters became known for their dedication to organizing and having skilled organizers.

John English had all the traits Tobin required, plus he had a way with members and potential members that could not be beat. Men gravitated to him and listened to what he had to say. Men who were thinking of joining the Union became more engaged in the organizing process after meeting English. They felt an instinctive trust for him and felt good about joining a union where “fellows like him ran the place.”

## The Auditor

The costs of running a union are financed by periodic dues and assessments paid by members. These are typically paid to the local by members at the union office or, in the early days, to a union steward or business agent. In turn, the local makes per capita payments to the national union based on its membership. Local dues are generally set by a vote

of the members; an activity that can generate controversy and attention.<sup>36</sup> As English described it, "It's a tough job; let me tell you...I speak from experience. As you know, I was on the road ten years myself going from one end of this country to the other, traveling by car, train and bus, sleeping in two bit hotels and sometimes spending Sunday looking up a secretary-treasurer who did his bookkeeping in his back pocket."<sup>37</sup>

For the next decade of his career, English would apply the knowledge acquired in his native Boston to local unions all over the country. He settled grievances, engaged in organizing activities, performed audits. In many ways he was a trouble-shooter and a bit of a "jack of all trades" for the Union. For example, in 1937, English was in Cincinnati, Ohio auditing the books of all the locals (which he found to be in good shape). While he was there, a strike among the truckers appeared imminent. English remained in Cincinnati to help local union officials both before and after the strike and earned kudos in the union publication, the "International Teamster."<sup>38</sup>

In January, 1936, Tobin placed Detroit Local 299 in trusteeship and dispatched English to perform an audit. Under a trusteeship or receivership, the affairs of the local are managed by a representative of the IBT. This happens if a local is suspected of some type of financial impropriety or questionable election proceedings. In his audit report, English wrote that the local "ran the business very loose. Business agents collected dues never turned in.... I have called the credit off. Books in bad shape up to January 1, 1936."<sup>39</sup> He dug in and set about trying to help repair the local. About this time a new young leader was gaining merit and rising in the local. This young man, only in his twenties, would be elected to run the local after the problems were solved. His name was James R. Hoffa. For Hoffa and English, kindred spirits in their devotion to the union and their desire to improve the lives of workers, this first, rather unremarkable meeting was the beginning of a partnership that would take the Union to new heights.

# 7 | Another War

## The Teamsters Do Their Part

On September 11, 1940, President Franklin Roosevelt addresses the Teamster Convention which was held in Washington, D.C. In the speech, coming just after he is nominated to run for an unprecedented third term as President, FDR praises organized labor and asks for the Teamsters' help in continuing the economic recovery and social reforms he has instituted. He also discusses the dire events occurring in Europe, including the Blitz bombing raids on London by the Nazis that had commenced just as the Convention convened. New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia also spoke at the convention, praising the Teamsters and urging support of Roosevelt's policies.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, the United States entered World War II: FDR again asked the Teamsters for help. By 1941, union membership had passed the half million mark and the members responded in force. Many members enlisted in the armed services, some showing up in groups from their locals. They also bought more than 2.3 million dollars worth of war bonds by 1943. This was a huge amount given that most of them earned less than \$40 a week. And, as the men went overseas, women stepped into the void. The number of women Teamsters vastly increased during the war, as did the types of jobs they were allowed to do. Tobin's efforts to support an American victory seemed endless. He recruited thousands of union members to drive Army supply trucks in Asia – 1,700 Teamsters actually built the well-known "Burma Road." They also helped built and run the famed "Red Ball Express" supply line in

France. In January, 1942, he authorized an \$8 million interest-free loan from the IBT treasury to the federal government. Along with other national labor leaders, he took a "no-strike" pledge for the duration of the war and worked tirelessly to enforce it.<sup>40</sup> In 1942, Roosevelt created the National War Labor Board which was the government's attempt to ensure good labor-management relations. It encouraged the employer and the union to settle disputes by bargaining rather than striking and aimed to control wages and fight inflation. Tobin advised Roosevelt in many areas and was sent to England by him to study War production methods that could be used in the United States. Roosevelt addressed the Teamsters again in 1944. His speech to the delegates became known as the "Fala" speech for its memorable references to his little Scottie dog, Fala. It would become one of FDR's most talked about speeches.

John English, a veteran of the First World War, watch with mixed emotions as young Boston Teamsters went off to war. He himself, even at age 53, was required to register with the War Office. All older men, born between 1877 and 1897 were required to do so in case they were needed to serve here or abroad. English followed Tobin's led and became very active in war effort activities. He helped lead scrap drives, organized care packages for soldiers and kept watch on the families of members serving in the military. He did all this while keeping up with the demands and travel requirements of his position. Like Tobin, he felt it was important to avoid strikes and other labor disruptions during the war, but he also wanted to ensure that workers were not taken advantage of in the "call to service" for war production. He also felt it was important to keep a close eye on local finances in case of an economic downturn or chaos in industry after the war.

### Fighting a Different Enemy

But as the war wound down, John English was fighting battles of his own. In 1945, English began to suffer serious effects from diabetes. In



conjunction with these problems, he developed a blister on his foot, which went unchecked. He soon developed a fever and finally had to be hospitalized. Due to limited use and availability of the new anti-biotic drugs, gangrene had set in and his leg was amputated. The diabetes had also reached a critical stage and English remained in the hospital for several weeks until his condition stabilized. In the March, 1945 edition of the *International Teamster*, Tobin reported "the serious illness of General Organizer John F. English, who is in a hospital in Boston, Massachusetts."<sup>41</sup> In December, 1945, English wrote to Dan Tobin, discussing the difficulties of being an amputee. After his leg was removed he went through many "trials" with artificial limbs, trying to find one that fit correctly and allowed him to walk with some degree of ease." I have my leg on again now for over two weeks and I hope that I will be able to keep it on. After every break, I must learn to walk all over again, starting in with two crutches, then crutch and cane and then one crutch and then the cane...This has been a long drawn out affair and I am doing everything I can carrying out the instructions of the doctor and also the artificial leg people....I ...will be the happiest fellow in the world if I can get going."

Even while in bed at the hospital or learning to walk on his new leg, English stayed active in union affairs. He wanted to hear about meetings, organizing efforts and the problems of returning vets. He also stayed up to date on finances of the locals he had been working with before his hospitalization. He was unhappy being out of commission and wanted to make sure no one dropped the ball in serving the members while he was gone.

### Post War Battles

In May, 1945, the war in Europe was finally over. Japan would surrender in August. However, in April, 1945, President Roosevelt died; sadly he was unable to see the victories he had worked so hard to achieve. The Teamsters and the labor movement lost a friend and ally and an era of



significant government/labor cooperation had come to an end. As Harry Truman became President, a postwar strike wave hit the United States as it had in 1919. While virtually all industries were involved, the most significant strikes took place in the coal, railroad, auto, and steel industries. Goods and services were either not produced or not delivered. Everyday life was disrupted and anti-union sentiment grew. Soon, there was a widespread public demand for a solution.<sup>42</sup> That solution was called the Taft-Hartley Act.

The Taft-Hartley Act was not only anti-union; it sought to remove some of the gains labor had won in the 1930's. The Teamsters were fighting the legislation and hoped to reduce the anti-union sentiment. But even Tobin, never one to mince words, lashed out at unions and reiterated his decades-old opinion of striking. "The senselessness and poor judgment used by unions and the officers of those unions in many instances is indeed discouraging.... We appealed to our people to hold off and not to antagonize the labor situation by strikes and shutdowns until this legislation was decided.... Sometimes we wonder if our local officers or our members read the papers.... Just look at the Seamen and Longshoremen strikes and look at the street-car men in St. Louis and Oakland. They could not do any more to injure the cause of labor if they were down there working with Taft and Hartley. As a matter of fact they were playing into their hands...."<sup>43</sup>

In 1947, over Truman's veto, Congress passed the anti-union Taft-Hartley Act. In general, the Act strengthened employers' rights to resist unionization and required unions to file financial reports with the government and disavow any and all affiliation with the Communist party. It also gave individual states the right to pass legislation that could override provisions of the national labor law.<sup>44</sup>

In his address at the 1947 Teamster Convention, AFL President William Green said, "the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act constituted a dangerous blow to labor's current activities and to its plans for the future. But at the same time, it had the salutary effect of rousing the

rank and file of our great movement.... Never before have I witnessed such a united and aggressive demand for action on the part of rank and file of labor...."<sup>45</sup>

## A Great Loss

In the midst of the post-war scramble of January, 1946, General Secretary-Treasurer John Gillespie died. His death came as a surprise to family and friends as he had gone into the hospital for what he described as "a fairly routine procedure." Tobin lost a close friend as did English. The Teamsters lost one of its founders and a great leader. The war years had taken a toll on the Teamsters leadership. In 1941, General Secretary-Treasurer Tom Hughes died unexpectedly. Hughes was a founding member of Local 705 in Chicago and one of the leaders who helped form the International Brotherhood of Teamsters in 1903. He had been General Secretary-Treasurer since 1906 and was a key player in the Union's development. English admired Hughes greatly and felt he learned much from him. Many of the other founding members of the Union died during this time too.

Tobin and Gillespie began driving wagons on the Boston streets in the early 1900's. English was recruited into the Union by Gillespie. Together, they all fought for better conditions for the Teamsters. Gillespie was well known and beloved by the members. Tobin now had to find a trusted successor to Gillespie's legacy.

Despite his grief and the reluctance to "replace" his good friend, Tobin realized he would not find a better right-hand man than English. His financial skills, experience in organizing and knack for rebuilding financially troubled locals were enough to win the position, but Tobin knew the job required more. It required heart, integrity, tenacity, union pride and an ability to connect with the members on a personal level. English had these qualities in abundance.

In 1946, Tobin announced that English would take Gillespie's place as General Secretary-Treasurer for the remainder of "Gil's" unfilled

term. Finally recovered from his health issues, English stepped in and assumed the second highest office of the largest, most powerful Union in the country.

## 8 | General Secretary-Treasurer

On April 1, 1946, English became the General Secretary-Treasurer (GST) of the IBT. He would serve the remainder of Gillespie's term and be re-elected by acclamation at the 1947 convention and at every convention thereafter. By now, he had been a Teamster for 40 years. English brought some unusual qualifications to the position of Secretary-Treasurer. His months of living, in effect, with the local unions, often for extended periods, made him extremely aware of their financial and record keeping inadequacies. Upon taking office, he immediately recommended a major change in the bookkeeping systems for both the locals and the IBT. Later he helped with the design and incorporation of a machine that mechanized the whole accounting process.

Also, English was one of the best known personalities in the Teamsters. For years he had travelled the country from coast to coast visiting locals and joint councils. The process of installing or removing charters, setting straight the accounts of willing, dedicated but often poorly trained secretary-treasurers, helping to settle strikes and handing out thousands of strike benefit dollars, as well as assisting with organizing campaigns gave numerous members an up-close look at the tall Teamster from Boston.

In an unpublished memoir, Dan Tobin wrote: "Brother English had thoroughly proven during his years on the road as organizer and auditor that he was competent, fearless and trustworthy. Of course, it cannot be denied that he was my choice for this office."<sup>46</sup> "He is my pal and so, too, was Jack Gillespie and so was Tom Hughes."<sup>47</sup> In 1947, English described his appointment to IBT convention delegates: "In

1946, as you know, I was appointed General Secretary-Treasurer and what were my orders then from Daniel J. Tobin? 'There is the job, go down there and do it.' And that I have tried to do."<sup>48</sup>

## The Role of the General Secretary-Treasurer

The GST was responsible for keeping the IBT financial house in order. As the number two job in the organization, the GST reported to the General President and the Executive Board. The GST was custodian of properties, funds, securities and assets of the IBT. He was responsible for paying all financial obligations of the IBT from the general fund. This included not only IBT expenses but also the strike benefits to the locals, as approved by the executive board under the rules of the IBT Constitution. The annual financial report that summarized the assets and liabilities of the IBT was also under the auspices of the GST. To manage the income stream received from the locals, as well as determine the number of convention delegates each local was allotted, the GST had a staff of IBT auditors. The GST was also responsible for furnishing the locals with all seals, stamps and supplies. The GST also kept IBT convention proceedings as well as General Executive Board minutes, copies of which were supplied to the appropriate parties on a timely basis.<sup>49</sup>

When English assumed the office in 1946, the IBT had been led for most of its existence by one General President, Dan Tobin, who had served in that job since 1907. There had only been three General Secretary-Treasurers since the Union's founding in 1903. Two of them, Tom Hughes, who served from 1906 to 1941, and John Gillespie, were friends of English. The financial authority of the General President was quite extensive and reflected the hands-on approach of the man who held the position. In 1952, Tobin told convention delegates that "the General President has almost complete charge of all investments subject only to approval of the executive board. The General-Secretary collects the money and puts it in the bank."<sup>50</sup> During the post-Tobin years,



when Dave Beck was President, English would seek Constitutional amendments to somewhat limit the financial authority of the General President's office to avoid the "one man organization."<sup>5</sup> He began to see that changes needed to be made to modernize the Union and update the ways of the old-timers, even though, as he would ruefully admit, he was an old-timer too.

In 1947, now nearly 900,000 strong, the IBT held its first full convention since 1940. The city chosen to host the event was San Francisco, a deviation from Los Angeles; the choice made at the end of the last Convention. That city could not offer enough rooms or meeting spaces to accommodate the growing Union. World War II caused the IBT to deviate from the schedule of meeting every five years, which had been adopted prior to WWI and Tobin was anxious to get the delegates together. He told English of his concern about the number of years between the Conventions. "People change, governments change, atmospheres change in seven years. We can't wait that long to find out what our members need and what they are thinking. If we wait too long we lose their trust." English agreed and worked hard to make sure members thoughts, ideas and suggestions, voiced through the delegates, were heard and taken seriously. Tobin was pleased to find he had not lost the members trust in the long years between conventions. He had been General President for forty years and the delegates gave him a thundering ovation as they reelected him for another term.<sup>52</sup>

At that convention, something happened which, by today's standards, might be termed "amazing." At that time, both the General President and the General Secretary-Treasurer received the same salary: \$30,000 per year. A motion was made to increase the General President salary to \$40,000. Not only did Tobin flatly refuse to accept the increase, but he also threatened to leave office if the motion passed. "If you want to get rid of the present incumbent, this is the way to do it," he said. Then, Dave Beck, an IBT Vice President from Seattle and chairman of the constitution committee, introduced an amendment to reduce the

salary of the General Secretary-Treasurer from \$30,000 to \$20,000 reasoning that the duties of the two positions were incomparable. English supported the amendment when he stepped to the podium. The delegates flatly refused to support the wage cut and the amendment was removed. English was then unanimously elected to a full five-year term. In accepting the position, English told the crowd of delegates that it was one of the proudest moments in his life.

English's tenure as GST would be influenced by the rough times he had endured on the Boston streets and also by the philosophies of Dan Tobin, the only General President he had ever known. Both of these influences would be characterized by a rigid adherence to financial accountability. English knew what it was like to fight for wages, both for himself and fellow Union members. He valued the greater good of the Union and was always reaching out to help or listen to its members. He was selfless, but he was also careful with money. Like many people who had endured hard times, he was conservative both in spending and investing. These characteristics alone would put him on a collision course with the next General President, Dave Beck.

Upon taking office, English wasted no time utilizing the skills honed by many years of experience. After only one year, he supported a resolution at the 1947 convention<sup>53</sup> that required the modernization of the IBT bookkeeping system which had not been changed since 1905. By August of 1948, he reported that the office of the General Secretary-Treasurer had undergone a major reorganization that included modernizing the accounting system, and purchasing new shipping equipment that resulted in faster communications with the locals at a lower cost. Additionally, the locals were successfully converting to the new accounting system authorized at the 1947 convention. Dues were the lifeblood of IBT finances and collecting those dues was paramount to the union's strength and survival. The new system made the whole process much smoother and more reliable. English would later call it the best bookkeeping system in the country.

Updating the accounting system was only a small part of English's many accomplishments. Constantly contacted by local and regional offices, English gave freely of his time and energy to those who asked for it. In recognition of his outstanding service, the delegates at the 1952 Convention in Los Angeles re-elected him to office by acclamation.

During his career, English saw the expansion of the joint councils, area conferences and trade divisions. He was always a welcomed guest speaker and his fondest moments were when he rubbed shoulders with "his boys." His sense of humor and endless stories were greatly appreciated. Old time members remember the anticipation of hearing another "good bit" from him. He would lean back a little, ever present cigar in hand, and maybe grin a little and say "Oh yes, I remember one time...."

## 9 | Conflict

"Let's have a look at our income over the past five years. Almost 30 million from per capita fees and another three from initiations. Pretty good for a bunch of toughs that had a hard time getting through school and ... sometimes didn't know where their next meal was coming from.... They shouldn't mix labor with politics. We should run our own business, not them. And if they mind their own business this will be a better country to live in." John English, September 30, 1957, 17th Convention, Miami Beach, Florida

During the 1950's, the threat of communism took hold, not only among organized labor but also among the general population. "Better dead than red," became a common term. In the mid-1950's, Senator Joseph McCarthy would engage in a campaign to oust communists from all aspects of American life, including business, the arts and even the movie industry. In 1957, Robert Kennedy would rally the McClellan Committee to investigate racketeering in labor and business, but the focus was really on labor. Thus began another stormy period in the relationship between government and labor.

In 1955, the American Federation of Labor merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations to form the AFL-CIO. The combined organization had 15 million members; the largest labor federation in the history of the United States.<sup>54</sup> George Meany, a former plumber's helper from the Bronx, was President. Meany was described as 230 pounds of Bronx granite. "In appearance he is a cross between a bull and bulldog, with resolute head set on short, massive neck, powerful hands and a bulk that bespeaks solidity rather than flabbiness. Custom-made suits and shirts have done little to give him elegance."<sup>55</sup>



Meany was unyielding, some would say passionate, in his efforts to clean the AFL-CIO of member unions that were perceived as corrupt. The AFL would feel the pressure to expel racketeers from its midst and the CIO would feel the pressure to expel communists. Meany followed closely the McClellan committee proceedings and cooperated with them as necessary. The Teamsters and Jimmy Hoffa, by now a prominent figure in the Teamster world, was one of Meany's targets.

Soon after the merger, the AFL-CIO created a Committee on Ethical Practices which had its own code of conduct. There were several ethical practices to which members were bound. Union members were required to apply for a charter to form a local union; union officials serving as trustees were not allowed to receive a salary for that trusteeship; corrupt individuals could not hold office; there could be no conflicts of interest between the personal financial interests of a union official and his official fiduciary duties; regular audits of union funds were required and union officials could not borrow or invest union funds for personal gains; and, union elections had to be open, democratic processes. In 1956, the AFL-CIO Executive Council went one step further when it announced that if, during the course of inquiries on alleged corruption from entities such as legislative bodies or law enforcement agencies, a trade union official invoked the Fifth Amendment, that officer had no right to hold office.<sup>56</sup>

On January 30, 1957, the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor or Management Field (the McClellan Committee) was created. The McClellan Committee followed the McCarthy hearings, during which Senator Joseph McCarthy and Counsel Roy Cohn attempted to root out the communists in American society. Robert Kennedy, assistant counsel to Roy Cohn, resigned in disgust and, ultimately, McCarthy was disgraced by his colleagues.

Robert Kennedy, convinced that organized labor was rife with racketeers, persuaded Senator John McClellan (D-AR) to establish a committee to examine corrupt union and management practices. The eight-member



committee, divided equally between democrats and republicans, was chaired by Senator McClellan. Members included Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), Sam Ervin (D-NC), John F. Kennedy (D-MA), Pat McNamara (D-MI), Irving Ives (R-NY), Joseph McCarthy (R-WI), and Karl Mundt (R-SD). Robert Kennedy was chief counsel. During its 270 days of hearings, which ended on March 31, 1960, the committee conducted over 500 open sessions and 1,526 witnesses appeared - 343 of whom took the Fifth Amendment.<sup>57</sup>

By the time it was over, the McClellan committee accused nearly 150 Teamsters of improper activities. When Beck took the stand, he invoked the Fifth Amendment numerous times. This triggered his expulsion from the AFL-CIO Executive Board, as invoking the Fifth Amendment violated that organization's code of ethics. Similarly, Jimmy Hoffa, who became Beck's successor as General President of the IBT, was a special target of Robert Kennedy.<sup>58</sup> During this time of fear and accusations, the McClellan Committee wielded a lot of power. Based on the accusations from the Committee, the AFL-CIO Executive Counsel threatened to expel the Teamsters from the Federation.

English was called to testify at the McClellan hearings. He was accompanied by his counsel, Edward Bennett Williams. The Committee, delving into the issue of "paper locals" (a fictitious local set up in a designated area) questioned him on the nature of the audits performed by the IBT. Even under the scrutiny of the TV cameras and the stony-faced committee members, English did not change his straightforward style. "On the left-hand side is the dues paid into the local union, and on the right-hand side is that paid into the international union. So the total for that number of years we subtract one from the other and they either owe us money or they don't." The Chairman was concerned that the audits as performed might not reveal financial improprieties such as fraud. He asked English if he had the authority to audit the books to see if there was a misuse of funds and, if at any time, he had reason to doubt the propriety of a local's

conduct. English replied, "Up to the last convention, I didn't have that, but I promise you I have it now." The Chair commended the Union for taking such an action and asked English if he was going to now step in and examine several locals under scrutiny. English replied, "Don't you think I have already stepped in?" "We know our business. We will take care of everything."

In 1952, after 45 years as General President, Tobin retired and Dave Beck assumed that office. Beck was born in 1894 in Seattle, Washington. A high school drop out, he joined the Teamsters in 1914 working as a truck driver. He rose through the Teamster ranks during that period when the trucking industry was in its early stages and devoted his career to organizing his fellow truckers. In the 1930s, he sought to create a unit within the Teamsters that he could control. Over Tobin's objection, he succeeded in setting up the Western Conference of Teamsters in 1937. It was comprised of members from 11 Western States and British Columbia. As General President, Beck, unlike his predecessor, subscribed to a purely business ideology selling labor for the highest price possible.<sup>60</sup>

In 1953, Beck also became a vice president of the AFL despite the reservations of its President George Meany and several other members. It is said that Meany considered Beck a loudmouth and wrote him off as more interested in money than in the welfare of his members.<sup>61</sup>

Beck served as General President of the IBT from 1952 until 1957 when, in the face of growing pressure, he announced he would not seek reelection. During this time, Beck and English did not enjoy a good working relationship. Beck did not have the same "save for the future" mentality as English. He was an active investor in the real estate market, both for his own purposes and on behalf of the IBT. English put a great deal of emphasis on efficient administration and conservative financial management.

Perhaps the most public example of their differences is English's refusal, in 1955, to use \$163,000 of IBT funds to pay for Beck's home in

Seattle (this was later approved) and his refusal to pay \$15,000 for the furniture.<sup>62</sup> Beck, who tended to see himself in a role much like the head of a company, did not see the request as a problem. He felt that his compensation should be similar to compensation received by other business and industry leaders.

In 1957, with the McClellan Committee hot on his heels, the controversy surrounding Beck reached an all time high. On May 20th of that year, the AFL-CIO removed Beck as a vice-president for violations of its code of ethics. In an effort to address the charges levied against him, such as breach of fiduciary duties, Beck sought to undertake a million-dollar public relations campaign using IBT funds. While Beck insisted that the Board approve such an expenditure, English was unwavering. "As long as I am General Secretary-Treasurer of the International, I will oppose any use of the union funds for that purpose."<sup>63</sup> The Board later approved a more modest expenditure geared not for Beck, but to stave off anti-labor legislation. The amount, about \$200,000, was considered the standard expenditure for fighting anti-labor legislation and other anti-labor political battles by most organizations.<sup>64</sup>

"*FOE OF BECK IN TEAMSTER UNION REPLACES HIM ON LABOR COUNCIL*" screamed the New York Times headlines. "John English ... Vows a Clean-Up Campaign" On May 21, 1957, one day after Beck was removed, the AFL-CIO Executive Council elected English to fill Beck's seat. George Meany, President of the AFL-CIO, commented that English "has a long record of integrity and service to the labor movement ... and he was more or less a natural." Meany also speculated that while the presidency of the Teamsters Union is their business, he thought English would like to get rid of Beck. Upon taking office on the AFL-CIO Council, English is quoted as saying, "We are going to wash our own dirty linen. American labor is going to be proud of us again."<sup>65</sup>

On May 25, 1957, Beck's secretary for 25 years, Ann Watkins, read a statement she received from Beck via a phone call that evening. "I was

to release this message: Mr. Beck told me he would not be a candidate for reelection at our convention this fall and that he was calling an executive board meeting in mid-June.”<sup>66</sup> Beck was now a lame duck. English was 68 years old and had been a Teamster for over half a century.

# 10 | English Speaks Out

In September, 1957, 1,700 delegates gathered in Miami, Florida for the 17th IBT convention. By now, English had been General Secretary-Treasurer of the IBT for 11 years. In 1952, his report to the convention delegates was primarily focused on the financial health of the IBT, the membership increase to over a million members and details of the new bookkeeping system. In 1957, however, his speech took on a different tone. It was clear that, while the IBT continued to grow both in membership and finances, the past five years had been turbulent. English, never one to mince words, summed up each hurdle. "For five years the Teamsters have been put to the test in every manner possible - inside as well as out. The past year especially has been a real tough one. Those of us who were close to the happenings in Washington were made sick by the efforts to destroy this Union. After 53 years among men, real men, it was tough to see this happen. But thank God... we'll still be on the top leading a movement that has done more for labor than any other."

The AFL-CIO felt his wrath. "We will never withdraw from the AFL-CIO but if they kick us out, we will not be in a hurry going back. We have given the AFL-CIO close to a million dollars a year. The AFL-CIO hasn't any money, whether you know it or not, while we will have the million dollars a year to use for organizational purposes if they kick us out.... After 46 years with the Teamsters, I told them I was going along with you, come what will. Those in the AFL-CIO who are still friends of ours we will look out for, but the rest can all go straight to hell."

And he shared his thoughts on the McClellan Committee. "You read in the papers a lot about English and the Senate Rackets Committee and Bob Kennedy and McClellan. I have never talked to



Bob Kennedy without having a witness there and I was never introduced to McClellan. So where do they get this stuff? I can look anybody right in the eye, but still there are a lot of people who would like to smudge a character."

On investments he said, "We have too much money invested. We should have more money in cash. I have pleaded time and again to keep a million dollars in the treasury so we could have it if there was a strike to come up very quickly. The money we have invested is all right, but we have invested too much according to my way of thinking."

And on Constitutional reform to the powers of the General Secretary-Treasurer, "I have watched the finances and also I have seen what has gone on in our International Union. Believe me, it was the toughest five years of my life. There are a lot of things I might have done as General Secretary-Treasurer but they couldn't be done because of the Constitution you gave us to work with in 1952. And I hope that this time you will give us a Constitution where it won't be a one-man organization and not 'you do as I say or else' when a General Executive Board votes you down. I say again, it was the toughest years of my life and I don't want to go through it again."

English, wearied after five years of conflict, accusations and often negative media attacks was still clear on his purpose. "Here I am, attending my 10th Convention of an organization that I've loved and fought for all these years and I get a feeling that here I belong, here I'm at home, among real, warm genuine friends. You might ask what it's like to devote a life-time to a cause. It's being sold on the cause, having faith in it and being willing to give everything you've got for it and I mean everything. I am never going to retire. Emeritus doesn't mean a thing to me. I will never put money before principle."

And he concluded by ushering in a new era for the IBT. "We are here today at the most crucial time in the history of the Teamsters Union. We are being watched by everybody all over the country. Yes, they have people here to our left and right from the FBI and the Senate Rackets Committee

and probably the American Federation of Labor watching what we do. I am standing here today, telling you that we are going to place in nomination the name of James R. Hoffa, the champion of the Teamsters' movement.... We don't care what other people think; we are nominating Hoffa for what he has done for the organization.... There may be a little trouble going on here and there, but he will take care of that."<sup>67</sup>

With that introduction, Hoffa addressed the cheering crowd as President-Elect of the now 1.5 million-member Union.

The delegates got down to work. During the convention, amendments were introduced and passed that would strengthen the oversight role of the General Secretary-Treasurer's office and were designed to ensure that some of the issues raised by the McClellan Committee were addressed. (The McClellan Committee was, however, very quick to state clearly that they had found no fault with John English.) In addition, the General Secretary-Treasurer's signature was required on all investment documents, thus giving him a potential veto power on the Union's investment policies. This addition was needed regardless of the leaders in office, but it reflected English's deep-seated distrust of Beck's investment strategies.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, despite the existence of a long standing finance committee, Tobin usually made the majority of the final investment decisions himself. The market crash of 1929 caused him to invest IBT money in safe, unexciting government securities. Beck changed all that and diversified the investments, seeking to leverage the non-interest bearing bank accounts and low yield government bonds. Over the remonstrations of Beck, English urged the delegates to pass a series of measures designed to limit the General President's wide authority over investments. They did.<sup>69</sup>

After the convention was over, the powers of the General Secretary-Treasurer had been expanded and the Teamsters had elected Jimmy Hoffa as their next President. And the Teamsters were on the rise again.

# 11

## I Never Thought I Would Live to See This

The series of events leading up to the Teamster's expulsion from the AFL-CIO were melodramatic. In September, 1957, the delegates at the IBT convention in Miami made their position crystal clear; Jimmy Hoffa was their President-Elect. In October, the AFL-CIO Executive Council suspended the Teamsters but stated that they could avoid expulsion if Jimmy Hoffa was barred from the Presidency, and the Union suspended enacting the amendments it had adopted at their Miami convention. These outrageous terms were rejected.<sup>70</sup>

On December 6, 1957, the Teamsters were expelled from the AFL-CIO by an Executive Council vote of 5-1. The Teamster delegation, about 30 strong, sat in a corner of the Atlantic City convention hall and listened to the votes come in. The tension was palpable. The meeting was televised and the cameras continuously roamed around the room, spotlighting the grim expressions of the attendees. Passionate speeches were made in defense of the Teamsters by other delegations, including a moving speech by A. Phillip Randolph from the Pullman Porters Union. The votes were in; the Teamsters were out. The 68-year old English unfolded his more than six-foot frame from his seat and approached the microphone that stood on the floor. Speaking straight from his heart, not notes, he lambasted the AFL-CIO. Newspaper accounts describe his speech as adding a sense of history and quality of feeling to the proceedings. He went immediately on the attack and his message was clear - you need us more than we need you.

"Regardless of what anybody here may say, deep down in your hearts you know there is not an International here that is any better than the Teamsters.... If it hadn't been for the Teamsters Union, how many times

in the existence of your organizations would you have lost strikes? Perhaps you might not even be here.... Oh, it makes my blood run cold. Coming near the end of my days, I never thought I would live to see this. The Teamsters more than any other International built up this organization for you; we were the ones that laid the foundation.... The Teamsters Union will get along, come what may. And we will never forget our friends, as Teamsters have never forgotten our friends. As far as our enemies are concerned, they can go straight to hell.... I am first, last and always a Teamster. When I look at those birds up there on the platform, I am afraid I might talk the Teamsters' language, because they have all got their minds made up to give us a hosing. But let me tell you, they will weep before we will, and you can take that any way you want to."<sup>71</sup>

At the end of his speech, no delegates got up to speak in favor of expulsion, not even members of the executive board. They sat silently, letting English's words sink in. Finally, Meany approached the podium. At that point, the Teamster delegation rose and walked out of the convention hall, leaving George Meany and the rest of the Executive Board on the dais to carry on. For English, to whom loyalty and principle were everything, expulsion created a wound that would never heal. In 1966, referring to pleas for help on various matters from other unions, he told Teamster convention delegates, "I got two slips of paper in the office; one for the ones that voted for us and ones against—anybody voted against us I tell them, 'Call up George; maybe George will help you.'"<sup>72</sup>



# 12 | The Monitors

The AFL-CIO threat was not the only shadow cast over the seventeenth IBT convention in 1957. A few days prior to the convention, a group of 13 “rank and file” Teamsters from New York, led by John Cunningham and represented by Attorney Godfrey Schmidt, filed a class action lawsuit in Federal District Court in Washington, D.C. seeking to enjoin the convention. The convention did take place; it was not held up in court, but after it was over, the plaintiffs filed another complaint reiterating their desire for an unbiased election and claimed that the convention had been rigged. On October 14th, one day before Hoffa was to take office, District Court Judge F. Dickinson Letts issued a preliminary injunction barring Hoffa from taking office until the plaintiffs’ challenge to the election could be heard on the merits. The trial started in mid-November, and by January, 31, 1958, a settlement proposed by the Teamsters was reached. Hoffa would take office on a provisional basis and a three-member, court-appointed Board of Monitors would serve as a watchdog to recommend any reforms necessary to enable a new convention and election to take place. The monitors would have their own staff and their expenses came directly out of the IBT Treasury.

What followed in the next three years, from January 1958 until its formal dissolution in February, 1961, was a labyrinth of legal battles along with continual musical chairs and in-fighting among the monitors. By the time the next Teamster convention took place in July, 1961, the Board of Monitors had already ceased to function - though not before draining the IBT treasury.<sup>73</sup>

English had no qualms about telling the monitors what he thought of them. As the oldest ranking executive in IBT headquarters, his philosophy





*Local 68 members delivering coal house to house. 1905.*



*Tip cart like those used by John English in 1904.*



*Boston Drivers with Silver medals for Humane Treatment of Horses. 1910.*



*Doyle's was one of the places coal drivers would stop to "warm up" on cold mornings in the early days. Doyle's is still in business today.*



*John English, Recording Secretary for Local 68. 1912.*





CONVENTION INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD  
OCTOBER 1-9, 1914



1920 Teamster Convention in Cleveland, Ohio.



John English, 31 years old.



REGISTRATION CARD		27
1	Name <i>John Francis English</i>	28
2	Home <i>107 Evans Boston Mass</i>	
3	Date of birth <i>Apr. 14 1879</i>	
4	Place of birth <i>natural-born</i>	
5	Where born <i>St. Boton Mass U.S.A.</i>	
6		
7	What is your occupation <i>Bus. Agent of Labor</i>	
8	By whom registered <i>Coal Seamster Union</i>	
9	Where registered <i>210. Union Park St Boston</i>	
10	How long in this city <i>single</i>	
11	What military service have you had? <i>none</i>	
12	Do you have any other children?	
I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.		
C <i>John Francis English</i> 775 ORDER NUMBER		

20-4-21. A	
REGISTRAR'S REPORT	
1	Is subject <i>Tall</i> <i>Dark</i> <i>Medium</i> <i>Build</i>
2	Color of hair <i>Brown</i> <i>Green</i> <i>Dark</i> <i>Blue</i>
3	Has person ever been in hospital or in jail, or in any other institution?
I certify that the answers are true, that the person registered has read the card, and that it has been witnessed by witnesses, and that all of the answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:	
WARD 21 <i>William P. Huddleston</i>	
3	
City or Town <i>Boston</i>	
State <i>Mass</i>	

English's Registration card for military service in WWI. He served in France.



John English, 1935.



*Teamsters General Executive Board 1935. Seated L to R: John Conlin; Tom Hughes GST; Dan Tobin GP; Mike Cashal; Standing L to R: DJ Murphy; John Geary; John English; Mike Casey; Leslie Goudie.*

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after April 28, 1877 and on or before February 16, 1897) 20

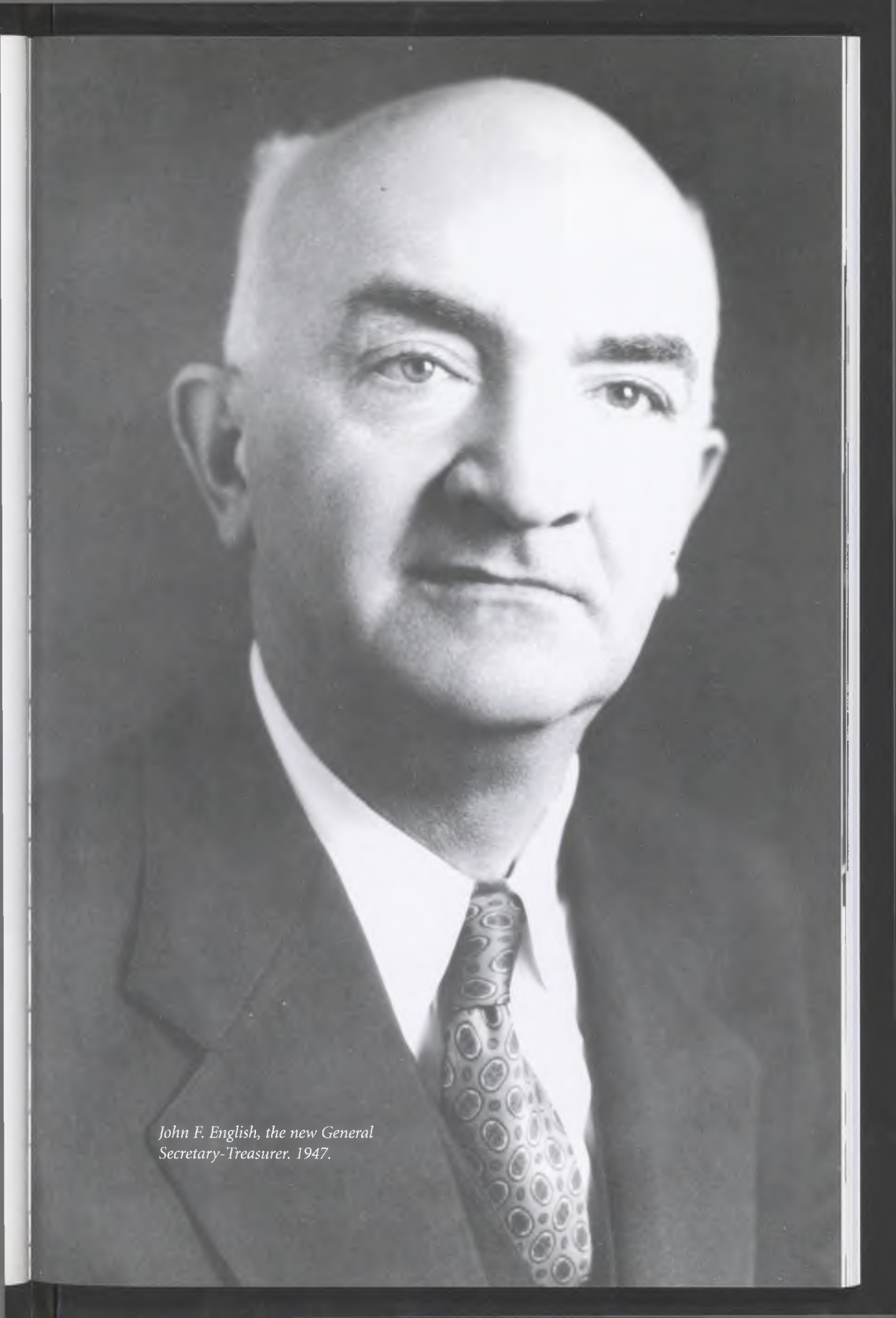
SERIAL NUMBER U 3384	1. NAME (Print) JOHN FRANCIS ENGLISH (First) (Middle) (Last)	ORDER NUMBER
2. PLACE OF BIRTH (Print) 22 HOWELL ST. DORCHESTER SUFFOLK MASS. (Street and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)		
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]		
3. MAILING ADDRESS SAME (Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If none insert word none)		
4. TELEPHONE None	5. AGE IN YEARS 53 DATE OF BIRTH APR. 14 1889 (Month) (Day) (Year)	6. PLACE OF BIRTH BOSTON MASS. (City and county) (State)
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS JOHN M. GILLISPIE, 222 E. MICHIGAN ST. INDIANAPOLIS, IND.		
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD TEAMSTERS, 222 E. MICHIGAN AVE INDIANAPOLIS, IND.		
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS SAME (Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)		
I ASSEVERATE THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.		
10. R. R. FORM 1 (Revised 4-1-42)	(over)	10-31000-2 <i>John F. English</i> (Signature)

English's military registration for WWII. Even at 53 years old, he was required to register.



English with members of the Boston Labor Council at an event in late 1945. English was just recovering from the loss of his leg due to complications from diabetes.





*John F. English, the new General  
Secretary-Treasurer. 1947.*



*John English and Dan Tobin convene the Teamsters Convention in San Francisco. 1947.*



*English and members of the GEB surprise Dan Tobin with a cake in 1951.*





*English addresses delegates at the Western Conference meeting in October 1951.*



*Beck, Tobin and English prepare for the upcoming Convention in September 1952.*



*English serves as pallbearer for Tobin's funeral, November 1955.*



*English views a painting of himself as a young Teamster in 1907 with IBT Comptroller Bill Mullenholz and artist Oscar Strobel. 1955.*





*English speaks at the dedication for the new Local 175 building, October 1956.*



*English casts a unanimous ballot for an unopposed candidate at the 1957 Convention.*

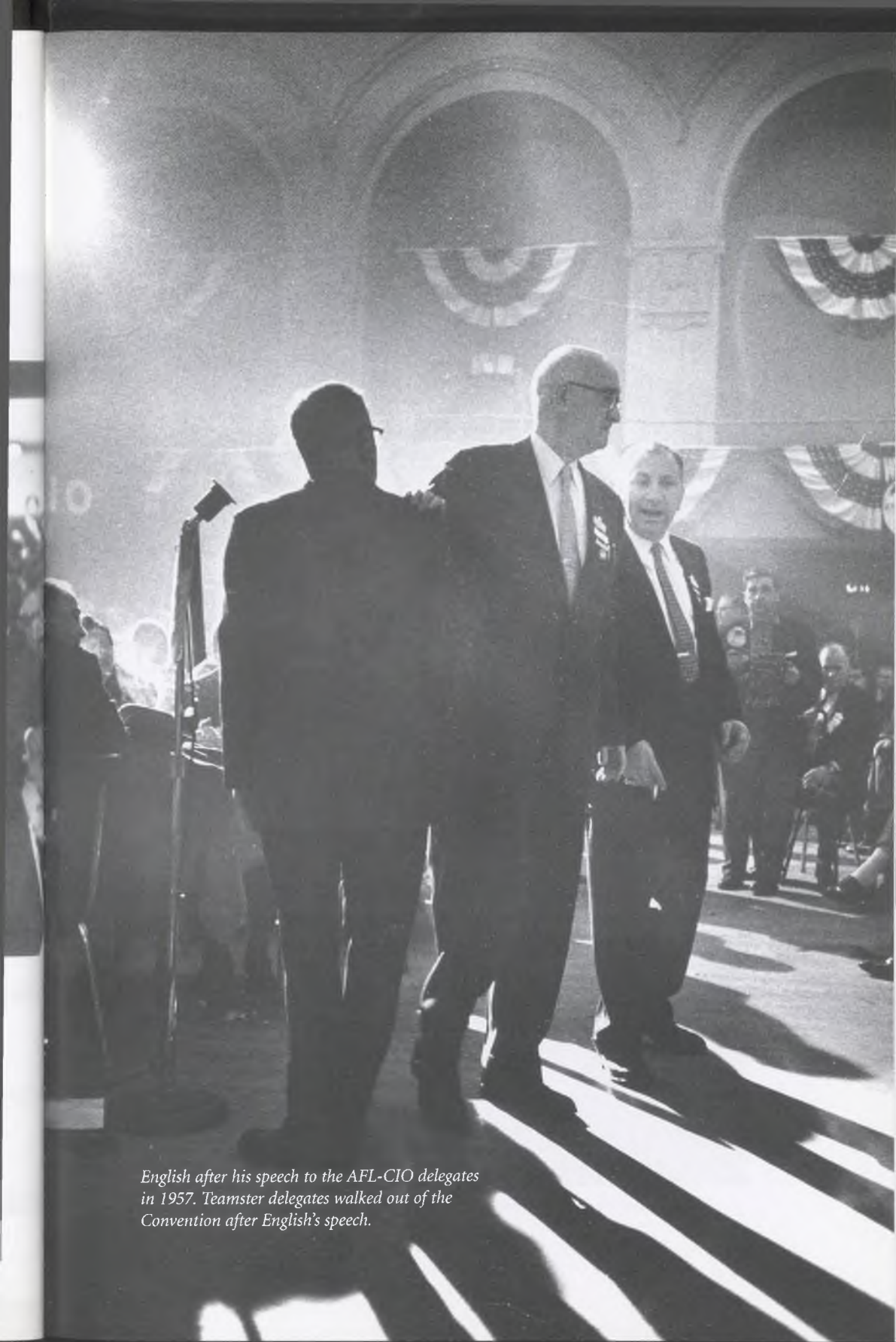


*English and Hoffa at the 1957 Teamsters Convention.*





*English defends the Teamsters at the 1957 AFL-CIO Convention.*



*English after his speech to the AFL-CIO delegates in 1957. Teamster delegates walked out of the Convention after English's speech.*

*A. Phillip Randolph,  
founder of the Brotherhood  
of Sleeping Car Porters, gave  
a stirring speech in defense  
of the Teamsters at the 1957  
AFL-CIO Convention.*



*English inspects a new accounting machine for use with locals. 1959.*





*English in his office. 1959.*



*English and VP Tom Flynn at the 1961 Convention.*





*English, Hoffa and VP Harold Gibbons confer in 1961.*



*Gertrude English (right) celebrates her birthday with her father at the IBT headquarters. A party was held for her every year. 1964.*



*English and Hoffa at the 1964 Eastern Region Conference.*



*English catches up with old friend Nathan Hurwitz, a founding member of Local 168, a laundry drivers local in Boston, at the 1964 Eastern Conference meeting. Hurwitz served as President of JC 10, as did English.*



*English instructs auditors on how to best assist local affiliates. 1964.*





*English and his wife Katherine at the 1966 Convention.*





*English, nearing eighty,  
is still hard at work in  
November 1968.*



*John F. English 1889-1969.*

## English Speech to AFL Convention 1957

PRESIDENT MEANY: *The Chair recognizes Vice President English*

VICE PRESIDENT ENGLISH: *Mr. Chairman and delegates: I want to say here that you have heard a lot about the Teamsters movement. Let me tell you something, that we have been in the AFL for over 50 years. I have been 53 years connected with the Teamsters movement, and 46 years of the 53 I have represented the Teamsters movement.*

*Regardless of what you or anybody says, deep down in your hearts you know there is not a union connected here that is better than the Teamsters Union. For 50 years every time you came to us we helped you. There aren't five organizations connected here that we didn't help at one time or another. There are International Unions sitting in here that owe the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. When you were on strike and when you couldn't get it from anybody else, when you knocked at the Teamsters door they helped you.*

*How many times in your lives, if it hadn't been for the Teamsters Union, would you have lost the strikes and maybe you would not be here?*

*Do you know that on two different occasions when the American Federations of Labor was down and out, when John L. Lewis and the CIO walked out of here, it was Bill Hutcheson and Dan Tobin that came to your rescue?*

*If it wasn't for the tax that they paid for the past 50 years, the AFL never would of existed.*

*We have 1,400,000 people in our Union, and every one of them is a union man, and you know it. You travel all over the country and you see them. Why should you condemn our Union for two or three fellows who have gone wrong? Aren't we entitled to that? How many of your International Unions can even live up to the Teamsters? We are on the chopping block now, but who is going to follow us? When you do, be judged by what you do here today and don't come weeping on our shoulders. We'll be able to take it. I wonder, will you be able to take it the way we are going to take it?*

*We have a case in Court this week. Dave Beck is on trail in Seattle. That means nothing to me. Jimmy Hoffa is on trail in New York. That's their business. That has nothing to do with me or our International Union. We are on trail Washington today over our election, and it was the best election we ever had in 50 year.*

*Are you going to expel us today while our case is on in Washington? Do we deserve that from you after 50 years?*

*We have done everything that is possible, but some people don't like us because we are a big organization and they are afraid we are going to be over-powerful. But while we were building up our organization did we cast you aside? No. We took you along with us. We have helped you. We want to help you, but some people don't like us.*

*We can't help if our organization elects the men to serve them. What right has anybody got to say that we can't do it? They are paying the men. We are*

paying you now, and a lot of you delegates don't know it, \$ 750, 000 a year, and we haven't asked you for that much. Never have we asked you for an organizer to help us. We fought our own fights.

My friends, think it over. Do they stop to tell you how many men are going to be laid off? Do they tell you that probably 100 organizers will go? Are they considering the Central Labor Unions and the State Federations of Labor? No. They want to be all-powerful. How quick they turn the collar. There aren't five international unions here that can stand the acid test. You sit here and you see us get whaled. Well, your turn is next, my boys, as I said before.

It's all right. There are some men sitting up on that platform there, and if it hadn't been for Dan Tobin they wouldn't be there. There are men sitting up that platform that if it hadn't been for our International Union you wouldn't have any union. Then you sit up there and you are ready to vote against us.

Don't forget, Mr. Meany, you never had a better friend than Dan Tobin and you never had a better friend than the Teamsters. I have been with all my life, Gompers, Green and you. The Teamsters stood by you. What are you going to do for us?

We are not asking you for any sympathy. Thank God, we have one million five hundred thousand men, and let me tell you, and let me tell you the truth, we had 30,000 new initiations last month – and that was a short month.

We have \$40 million, and I wish to God we didn't have it, because when we only had \$1.50 we never had any trouble. But the minute we got a dollar in the treasury all these lawyers are taking it. How in the hell did we run our organization when there weren't any attorneys? There's seven or ten of them now robbing us, a hundred bucks a day, and they can't agree among themselves. How in the hell can we win these cases?

I have served about every position in the International Union. I have been a business agent and I have been an organizer and I have been an auditor for ten years, and in ten years I never had anybody arrested. When I found somebody was wrong I kicked them out of the organization. I didn't even write in to Tobin. And they could do it right here.

We ask for one year. After giving you 50 years, giving you all our time and our money we ask for one year to clean up our house. Beck is gone, Brewster is gone and Brennan is gone. There is only one man – Jimmy Hoffa has done more for our International Union than anybody connected with it, including myself. How in the hell can we kick him out? Does he deserve that? He is fighting to get clear himself, and if he can't get cleared then that is up to us. It has dwindled down to one man.

My God, my friends, they say in unity there is strength. We joined this organization and we stayed with you all the way through. When other left you, you could depend on the Teamsters. Did we ever say no?

My friends, the penalty is too severe, it is too severe. For one or two little wrongdoings we are to be expelled. Expulsion – that's all we talk about. How

many of you have been business agents? How many men have you forced the employer to take back when in your heart you know they were wrong? I was A business agent for 25 years.

Oh, It makes my blood run cold. I am coming near the end of my days. I never thought I would live to see this. We built this organization up for you, and we were the ones that laid the foundation. We tried to build a good house, and we did it, and for all the good we have done you are going to tell us today "We are going to expel you". And they're going to have it in the Federal Court before the day is out, probably, in Washington and we are on trial.

When you asked us, we answered the call. We want no sympathy from you; we want no money. Thank God for that. Years ago we were trying to rob Peter to pay Paul and do everything to keep the organization going.

So I say to you, my friends, the Teamsters Union will get along. We won't forget our friends. Teamsters never forget their friends. As far as our enemies are concerned, they can all go straight to hell.

We are asking for nothing but a square deal. I want you, if you will, to take a look at the representatives of the Teamsters Union over there in that corner. If you have an International Union that can produce any better than them, then I will shut my mouth.

What do you expect of us? Is it because we are in a little trouble that you are going to crucify us? Who are you crucifying? I will be General Secretary-Treasurer, no matter who is General President, and I will be there protecting our organization. I am not interested in the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO; I am interested in the Teamsters Union. I am a Teamster. I am afraid I might talk the Teamsters language when I look at all those birds up there. They have all got their minds made up to give us a hosing. Well, let me tell you, you will weep before we will. You can take it any way you want to.

I want to tell you, my friends, I am depending upon you. I have represented my organization for 46 years and I love them. You know a lot of them. You can throw us out today but, brothers, the boys on the platform are waiting to give it to some more of you, and they can take that the way they want to.

I want to tell you, you use your own minds. Don't let anybody snap the whip and fall in line. That is what a lot of them are doing. But John F. English won't listen when you snap the whip, whether it is the AFL or my own International Union.

So I plead with you, if we as the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, regardless of the officers here, have done something for you, we just want to return it today; nothing else. If Dan Tobin and Bill Hutcheson were alive today, this thing would not have happened.

Don't let them tell you about the Teamsters Union. We are loved by all. You fellows in here love us and you know they are giving us a bum deal. Are you going to stand for it? Those of you who help us,, I promise you in the name of the International Union, we will never forget you and we are not going to wrong the membership of your unions because your International Presidents vote wrong.

Thank you very much.



of "taking care of your own" had its roots back in the Boston streets at the turn of century. He echoed this sentiment whenever he could.

In October, 1958, English published a letter to the monitor chairman, Martin O'Donoghue, in the *International Teamster* magazine. Almost mockingly, he addressed the letter, "Dear Marty, I believe the time has come to tell our membership about the strange things that are going on. You are always talking about 'safeguarding the rank and file's dues money.' I think they should know what you are doing about that." English then quotes O'Donoghue's speech before Judge Letts. In it O'Donoghue states that the 1957 convention was, in fact, held in accordance with the constitution. However, after being appointed as a monitor, O'Donoghue changed his story claiming that new accounting and auditing procedures must be established to ensure a fair and democratic convention. "Something is cockeyed," English noted. "I think our members should be aware of the fact that you are also general counsel for the Plumber's Union, which is George Meany's outfit. You have a duty as a Monitor to protect and help our union. I don't think you are doing it... and our membership should know how I feel about it.... This is a great, democratic union. Our members have the best wages and conditions of any in the country. They're not dumbbells and you can't fool them. That's why they should have these facts and decide for themselves whether you are 'safeguarding' our funds, or using them for strange purposes against the best interests of our union."<sup>4</sup>

By 1960, English reported that the monitors had cost the IBT almost \$692,000 in salaries and expenses. "You are sucking the lifeblood out of us," he bluntly announced. "It's not going to get better, it's going to get worse," he reported. The monitor staff now includes five lawyers, six secretaries and one analyst.... Projected on a year's basis, this could amount to more than \$115,000 each year for staff alone.<sup>75</sup>

John English believed there should fair standards and practices set for unions but he believed the Teamsters Union was unfairly being singled out for oversight. And, he always wondered why no businesses were

ever so scrutinized or why no business leaders were ever smeared the way so many labor leaders were, with charges routinely based more on rumor or acrimony than on merit.

# 13 | You Do What You Can

Despite his brusque manner, English had a streak of generosity that touched many who knew him. He had high standards for himself and others and believed you got what you earned, whether it was wages, authority or respect. He knew life was not always easy and expected others to have an understanding of that too. And he expected people to pull their weight, do their job. Staff members working at the IBT during English's tenure recalled that he always kept them on their toes and would harbor no slackers. "You knew not to be in the long hallway on second floor between 2 and 3 pm," Bob Downing remembered. "Mr. English would take a walk to stretch his leg during that time and heaven help anyone standing out there looking like they had nothing to do!" Downing also recalled that English was a stickler for manners and neat appearances. Men in the office were expected to wear a coat and tie to the cafeteria and he hated to see women smoking at their desks. But, he was always willing to lend a hand and help others out.

## Dream Car

Norma Bartus, an IBT employee since 1959, remembers that generosity very well. Her memories are enhanced by a small journal, the leather worn thin from years of handling; the pages brittle and the ink faded.

Back in 1959 she was a young girl of eighteen, here in the United States from Scotland and trying to make a success of her first job. To accomplish that, she knew she would need to buy a car.

The idea of buying a car did not thrill her as it did some girls her age. This was a big responsibility and a lot of money. She figured her

costs over and over again, but it always can out the same. The most she could spend was \$800. She would just have to find something for that price.

A few days later, her phone rang. When she picked it up, a familiar voice boomed through the receiver. "I hear you are shopping for a car." No greeting, no small talk, just right to the point. "Well, yes...." "Come down to my office." Click. Staring at the receiver, she wondered what this was all about. Off she set for English's office on the second floor.

Arriving at his office, she entered, and a hand holding a large cigar waved her to a chair. "So, what kind of a car are you looking for?" he asked. "A used one," she said. "What? It's not a good idea to buy a used car. You never know what you are getting."

"I know, but I can't afford a new car."

Silence while he puffed thoughtfully. After a few seconds he asked, "How much do you have to spend?"

"Eight hundred dollars."

"Art will take you out to look for a car after work. Then we'll talk."

Knowing better than to argue with him or Art, who was the IBT chief accountant, she simply agreed and that evening, found herself looking at cars. They looked at the used cars but nothing caught her eye. Suddenly, she spied it. It was a brand new shiny aqua Biscayne with enormous wings. She stopped and stared. Suddenly, she was her idol; Dinah Shore. She was seeing the USA in her Chevrolet. That moment passed when she saw the price: \$2400 - way out of her league. Shaking her head, she and Art left the lot. The next day, she went back to his office and reported what she had seen. There was nothing affordable and the only car that turned her head was the brand new aqua Chevrolet that she and Dinah Shore could use to see the USA. Without knowing why, she described it in detail. When she was finished, he looked at her thoughtfully.

"How much is this car?" he asked.

Sighing, she said, "\$2400."



He opened his desk drawer and took out his checkbook. Putting his cigar down, he scribbled something, tore off a check and pushed it across the desk. She looked down. It was a check for \$1600 made out to her.

"That's the rest of the money for the car. You can pay me back over time."

Astounded, she tried to protest, but he would have none of it.

Nearly fifty years later, she opened up the little worn leather book. There, on each dated page, in his spidery writing, was a notation, "Received, \$100" and a remaining balance. The last entry said, "Received, \$100. \$1600 paid in full. John F. English." She never forgot that car or the man who made her dream possible.

Bartus had one other major memory of English's kindness. Her future husband was a Hungarian immigrant who had escaped his home country during the 1956 revolt. The U.S. quota for Hungarian immigrants was full, so he went to Canada. She met him while living there for ten months before moving to the United States herself. They wanted to get married but could not unless he had an established sponsor who was an American citizen. English heard the story and told her he would sponsor her young man. He even attended the wedding.

## Making the Grade

John Mullenholz, son of IBT Comptroller Bill Mullenholz, was not officially related to John English, but he regarded him as family. He and all his siblings referred to English as "Uncle John." He remembers quite well what difference English made in his life and recalls one important day in particular. "I remember walking along the street, a day like any other. Reaching the corner, waiting for the light to turn, I straightened my tie and unconsciously patted the check in my pocket. The future stretched out like a book waiting to be written. How quickly time passes. I could still remember the shock and elation when I had been accepted to law school and how proud Uncle John had been. But nothing had prepared me for the day when Uncle John offered to pay my tuition. Nothing. A selfless gesture and not out of character for English, but a

surprise all the same. Every year after he had made the offer, I went to Uncle John's office and had received a check for the year's tuition.

Arriving at my destination, I took the elevator to the second floor. I walked towards the corner office, past all the familiar, smiling faces. The smell of the cigar told him Uncle John was there even before he reached the doorway. When I saw my benefactor sitting behind his large polished desk, growling into the phone, I smiled. Waving me to a nearby seat, Uncle John hung up the phone and began to chat. But that day, I was in no mood for small talk. Instead, I reached into my pocket and pulled out the check. I put it on Uncle John's desk and sat back. No words could express my gratitude for receiving three years tuition, nor the satisfaction of repaying every last dime." Uncle John was proud too—because Mullenholz had proved himself to be an honest, responsible and steadfast young man. In English's eyes, that was the mark of true character.

### The Ties That Bind

The men who worked in the Office of the General Secretary-Treasurer slowly filed into the big corner office. They knew what was coming. It was Christmas and thus began the familiar ritual. As the men filed in they saw them, just like last year and probably like next year. Ties. Loads of them. Draped over every available space - the chairs, the conference table, even the horse statue was wearing a tie. The men groaned inwardly. "Help yourselves, boys! Merry Christmas!" Their boss stood at full height and with a smile and wave of his cigar, he invited the men to choose their Christmas present brought in every year from a store in Boston. Amidst casual chatter and exchange of good cheer, each man picked out what he thought was the least ugly tie he could find from the assortment of neckwear. John English, they said, had a good heart, but not always good taste! They chuckled then and they chuckle now at the memory....<sup>76</sup>

John English got a kick out of making others happy. He would stand back and smile as his daughter clapped her hands with delight during

birthday parties, gleefully watch as children of striking members opened gifts from "Santa" or feel satisfied knowing his actions could help make the life of someone he knew, even casually, better. He also arranged many scholarships for financially strapped students hoping to attend college at places like Boston College in his hometown. He truly believed the Teamsters were a family and you took care of your family. But, he didn't like people to make a fuss over these deeds. That embarrassed him. And, he did not want people getting the idea that he was a "softie." He couldn't be most of the time - he had to drive hard bargains, get people to tow the line and keep a close eye on all the purse strings. He was the guy who said "no" a lot. So when he had the chance to say "yes," he took it.

He did do a little something for himself once in awhile too. English had a sweet tooth and loved strawberries and any dessert made with them. However, he was diabetic and his wife kept a close eye on his diet. So he arranged for Tommy Hughes, the son of the late GST Tom Hughes, to grow strawberries in his yard and secretly bring them into the office. English would then ask the cafeteria staff to fix them for him. He figured a "treat" occasionally couldn't hurt...as long as Katherine did not find out!

# 14 | Fifty Years of Serving the Members

On January 7, 1961, 2,000 Teamster officials gathered in the ballroom of the Commodore Hotel to pay tribute to "Mr. Teamster" on his 50th anniversary as a Teamster officer. So sincere was the appreciation for his service, the IBT sent out notices of the dinner on special letterhead printed solely for this occasion. Sponsored by the Teamsters Eastern Conference, Comedian Alan King hosted the event and popular singer Eydie Gorme was one of the performers who provided entertainment.

General President Hoffa gave the 72 year-old English a plaque that read, "During his half century as an official of his beloved union, he has helped gain untold benefits for hundreds of thousands of workers and their families and, in so doing, has won the admiration and affection of all who know him and his valiant work. For his unparalleled record of achievement and for the dignity and prestige he brought to our union, we are profoundly grateful. And, verily, we say, the labor movement will never see his match again. As he has become known to thousands, he always will be "Mr. Teamster."<sup>77</sup>

John English kept a painting behind his desk in his office in Washington D.C. that was not an old master or a famous icon, but something closer to home, something to remind him of his roots. The painting was a detailed watercolor depicting a teamster done by the artist Oscar Strobel, a noted painter and illustrator in the 1950s and 1960s. The subject of the painting, a young boy driving a tip cart coal wagon is taken from a 1907 photograph of John English himself. Strobel was the artist selected to help the IBT purchase art work for the new headquarters building that opened in 1955. Strobel chose art work that represented every geographical location that Teamster



members worked at the time, including Canada, Panama, and the territories of Hawaii and Alaska. The latter two areas did not become States until 1959.

In July, 1966, at the 19th convention in Miami, the Teamsters passed a resolution creating the "John F. English Endowment" fund to further commemorate his years of service. Each year, \$5,000 would be given to an institution of higher education that had a program devoted to the labor movement. The first year, English would designate the recipient. After that, the recipient would be chosen by each of the regional Conferences, on a rotating basis.<sup>78</sup> English chose Boston College and in August, 1967, presented Reverend Robert McEwen, S.J. with a check for \$5,000 for research into the role of labor unions in the consumer movement.<sup>79</sup>

English gave his keynote speech at that 1966 convention, just as he had done since 1947 when he was first elected to the office of the General Secretary-Treasurer. While he retained some of his feistiness at 78, his tone was somewhat reminiscent and almost prophetic. "I love this union. I love it.... I would like you to come up and say hello. This may be the last convention for me. You have never heard me talk this way, but I think I am duty bound to tell you of my ups and downs in this Teamsters Union."

Even though nine years had passed since the Teamsters were expelled from the AFL-CIO and the McClellan Committee held its hearings, English's outrage remained fresh.

"Now, I am going to tell you something. We are not going back to the AFL-CIO. We are not going back while I am General Secretary-Treasurer, because by God, I won't sign the check. There is nobody going to slap the Teamsters on one side of the face and then slap us on the other, not while I have life enough to stand up. I have represented you all my life. Time is creeping up on me. Oh, if I was only twenty years younger!"

"Bob Kennedy came into my office. Billy Mullenholz was there because I wouldn't speak to Kennedy alone. Well, you know those people; they lie to win a point.... He wanted me to go against Hoffa.... I

said, 'You've got the wrong fellow.' He was born in East Boston, and I was born in South Boston. And his people are all politicians, both on one side and the other...."

"So, I tell you again, listen to all these politicians all you want to... but when you get through listening to them, then you listen to us. We will take care of your bread and butter.

You have to have a little guts. Be a man and stand up. That is what this Teamsters Union is made of. You see Hoffa and I take it on the chin day in and day out. Of course, I don't take it now like I used to because I have seen better days and I am coasting.... I was with him in '57, and I was with him in '61 and I am with him in 1966.... Any of you who helped me in any way - people that worked for me or anybody else along the line - after all these years I want to thank you, because you and I probably won't meet again."<sup>80</sup>

# 15 | Farewell to a Friend

On January, 27, 1969, English was hospitalized at the Miami Heart Center. He was in Miami preparing for the General Executive Board meeting when he took ill. The following Monday, February 3rd, the Teamsters Union lost its beloved General Secretary- Treasurer.

Over a thousand mourners, including labor officials and members of the AFL-CIO, attended the requiem mass in the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston. Then, through the same streets where a 15-year old boy once drove a coal cart, a 100-car procession accompanied John English to his final resting place in St. Joseph Holyhood Cemetery.

John English was a devoted husband and father, loyal friend, and first, last and always a Teamster.

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## Interviewees

Norma Bartis

*International Brotherhood of Teamsters*

Robert Downing

*International Brotherhood of Teamsters (retired)*

Douglas Heim

*International Brotherhood of Teamsters (retired)*

Kitty Heim

*International Brotherhood of Teamsters (retired)*

Kenneth Householder

*International Brotherhood of Teamsters (retired)*

Ron Hudson

*International Brotherhood of Teamsters (retired)*

### *Local 25 retirees:*

Joseph Cuggino

Gene Todd

Joe Conti

Danny Splane

T. Edward Sheehan

### *Family of William Mullenholz:*

John Mullenholz

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"It was the sense of dedication and sacrifice in the face of overwhelming odds, such as English displayed from the earliest days of the union to the present, that had helped to build the International Brotherhood of Teamsters into the greatest union in the world."

— *James R. Hoffa, Teamsters General President 1961*

"Here is a man with the heart of a lion...He refused to have the Teamsters used as a scapegoat by so-called labor leaders who hoped to gain legislative favors by throwing us to the wolves. Through all these years, English has never failed to carry out any assignment which would increase the economic security, the working conditions, and the standard of living of Teamster member."

— *Tom Flynn, International Vice President, 1961*

"He has done an outstanding job. He is a man who can say yes just as fast as he can say no, but once you have convinced John English of your sincerity and your desire to represent the membership of this great union, you have nothing to fear from this great man."

— *Ray Schoessling, President, Joint Council 25 1966*



The International Brotherhood of Teamsters

James P. Hoffa, General President

C. Thomas Keegel, General Secretary-Treasurer

